THE PARIAH

By the Author of

VICE VERSÂ

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To Edith M. Millar
from her loving Brother
the Author

27: Oct: 1889

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THE PARIAH

VOL. I

THE

PARIAH

BY

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AUTHOR OF 'VICE VERSÂ' 'THE GIANT'S ROBE'
'A FALLEN IDOL' ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. I

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THE PARIAH

BOOK I.

ANTIPATHY AND ATTRACTION

'*Sie war liebenswürdig, und er liebte Sie; Er aber war nicht liebenswürdig, und Sie liebte Ihn nicht*'

(Altes Stück) HEINE

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CHAPTER I

ENGLISH EXCLUSIVENESS

> And curving a contumelious lip,
> Gorgonised me from head to foot
> With a stony British stare.—*Maud.*

It was the hottest hour of an afternoon in mid-August; the *plage* at Trouville was crowded, the great bathing function at its height.

Bathing-machines were lurching and jolting down to the water's edge; stout French gentlemen, striped red, white and blue, like cheap sweetstuff, were floundering in a couple of feet of water with the air of sea-lions; younger men were swimming out beyond the masts, or displaying their symmetry on the deck of their double-canoes; ladies in baggy blue tunics and trousers were clinging to the ropes and screaming with shrill ecstasy when a larger wave than usual knocked their oilskin caps together; on the sands there were gay tents, tricolour flags, giant umbrellas, under which the bathers received *en peignoir* or read their 'Gil Blas' and 'Petit Journal' between their dips.

To the British mind there is something irregular and almost improper in the idea of bathing in the afternoon, and the British constitution generally prefers to digest its mid-day meal under other conditions than seated on a straw chair, in a scorching sun, and on glaring white-hot sand, watching foreigners making more or less painful exhibitions of themselves.

And so, the Grand Hôtel Californie at Trouville being the establishment most in favour with English-speaking visitors, some of these were generally to be found at this particular time upon a terrace opening out of the central salle of that hotel, and protected from the sun as far as possible by a great awning.

This afternoon, for some reason, the party was less numerous and representative than on others, consisting chiefly of Mr. and Mrs. Spoker, a young married couple, and Mr. Hiram P. Whipple, a reflective but uncommunicative American, with a withered wife and a brilliant daughter.

Conversation had followed its well-worn groove—abuse of the management, the hours, the wines, the cookery, the beds, the charges, for there are few travellers with souls so dead as to own themselves satisfied with anything at a foreign hotel; but all that could be said on these subjects had been said once more and a pause had followed, the reproach of which each seemed too lazy to remove, until Mr. Spoker, a light-eyelashed, foxy-faced young man, introduced a new subject.

‘If we’d had a little more energy, all of us,’ he remarked, ‘we might have been at Deauville races this afternoon; they ran a drag over from the hotel.’

‘Well,’ said Miss Magnolia Whipple, ‘if anything could make me hotter than I am it would be looking on at horse-racing on an afternoon like this; not that you could expect any horse to hurry—they won't do more than stroll quietly along the course on the shady side.'

'Of course,' said Mr. Spoker, 'these foreign meetings aren't like the real thing—rather *playing* at racing.'

'Now wouldn't anyone think, to hear him talk, that he never missed a race when he's at home?' cried his wife, who charged herself with the duty of unmasking her husband's harmless little affectations; 'and yet I don't believe he was ever even at the Derby more than once in his life—now, *were* you, Alfred? Ah, he won't answer!' she cried in high glee. 'I've offended him. Never mind, Alfred, dear, you *do* know something about racing—he spotted the winning horse at the "Petits Chevaux" last night from the way it carried its tail—he won fourteen francs, which gives him a right to talk like a sportsman.'

'As you lost them and a lot more in the course of the evening,' retorted Mr. Spoker, 'I should have thought it didn't give you any right to talk at all.'

'Should you, Alfred, really? Ah, well, you see your mistake now, dear. By the way,' she broke off, 'does anyone know what has become of Mrs. Chevening and her daughter? they generally sit out here for a little while. I wonder if they've gone to the races!'

'Mrs. Chevening's too real high-toned to go, unless it was on top of a four-in-hand with a few dukes around,' drawled Miss Magnolia Whipple. 'And there's not much aristocracy at this hotel, only one Italian prince, and poppa took *him* for a waiter.'

'Magnolia Whipple, you do dress things up beyond all!' remonstrated her mother; 'your father merely told him he must take two dollars off our bill; it was the hotel clerk he thought he was speaking to.'

'Well, and that wouldn't turn most princes' heads, I should think. But it was Mrs. Chevening we were talking of. Can anyone inform me what's the reason they have for thinking themselves just too select for anything, those two, particularly the girl? Why has she got that way of not seeming to have any use for most people? Who is she, anyway?'

'They belong to a good family—well connected and all that—related to Lord Yaverland,' said Mr. Spoker.

'Alfred, you are too funny when you talk Peerage, and you don't know anything about it yourself—only what she chose to tell you.'

'She's the widow of a colonel, isn't she?' said Miss Whipple, 'and not a live colonel at that. We don't think very much of that at home. And they don't seem to live in any style where they are, either. I don't see why they behave as if nothing and nobody was good enough for them.'

'Magnolia,' said her mother, 'you'll have people thinking you're jealous if you go on that way.'

'Mother's like the lady who was always telling her daughter to take her eyelashes out of tangle,' said Miss Magnolia with perfect serenity; 'but I'm not jealous—our styles are too distinct to clash. And I admire her ever so much. I think she's too beautiful almost to live, and I'd just adore her if she'd let me—but she never has any time for me, and that makes me so mad with her. I don't like being made to feel no account every time!'

One or two of her male listeners seemed half conscious here that a complimentary speech of some sort was expected from them, but complimenting the pretty American in public was rather like riding at the quintain; any lack of adroitness was certain to result in a shower of chaff, so they deferred the venture to a more private occasion.

She had scarcely finished her sentence before one of the swing-doors which communicated with the central hall of the hotel opened, and the party was joined by the lady whose title to exclusiveness she had been calling in question.

Mrs. Chevening greeted the company with a smiling and comprehensive nod, not perhaps free from a suspicion of condescension, as she took one of the seats that had been placed at her disposal. She was a handsome woman, who moved and spoke with a languid grace that was mannered without being affected. In spite of the grey streaks in her luxuriant hair, and one or two lines traced by anxiety or worry on her brow and about her mouth, she looked some years younger than her actual age, which was forty-three. Her dress was what an English matron of means and position might be expected to wear at such a place, and certainly, even to a female eye, betrayed no signs of undue regard for economy.

'We've just been discussing some of the people at this hotel,' said Miss Magnolia audaciously.

'Oh,' said Mrs. Chevening, who did not approve of Miss Whipple; 'and were they really worth the trouble?'

'Well, we were wondering,' replied the young lady demurely.

'I can't say I have seen anyone as yet in whom I could feel the faintest interest,' continued the other. 'Trouville is so changed from what I remember it—such a very different class of people come here now.'

'Talking of queer people,' put in Mr. Spoker, who perhaps felt that the conversation was trenching on delicate ground, 'who's the man who goes about in a pith helmet—man who comes to *table d'hôte* in a light coat—looks like an Army man?'

'Not in the least like any Army man *I* ever met!' said Mrs. Chevening in the tone ot an authority on the subject; 'he looks an odious person—they put him next to me at dinner last night.'

'Did you get any talk with him?'

'I? no, indeed! I am not so fond of talking to persons I know nothing about, so many people travel now who are quite too impossible; and this man may be a bootmaker or something dreadful of that kind at home, for anything one can tell.'

'If you really want to know all about him, Spoker,' said one of the men, 'old Liversedge is your man; lives in his part of the country, or knew him out in India or something—don't seem very intimate here though.'

'Mr. Liversedge knows something about everybody, it seems to me,' said Miss Magnolia; 'and it's never anything they'd be likely to put in their autobiographies either. It seems a little cooler now; the band will have begun at the Casino by this time; suppose we make a move;—won't you honour us, Mrs. Chevening?'

'You are very good,' was the reply, 'but I must find my daughter first. I thought she would have been out here.'

'She hasn't come near us since lunch. Seems as if she had found more interesting company somewhere,' said Miss Whipple, not without malice, as she prepared to descend with the rest of her party and cross the boarded sands to the Casino.

Meanwhile the wearer of the pith helmet—a covering which had procured him notice even at Trouville, where hats and caps incline to the fantastic—had been wandering disconsolately about the town. Earlier in the day he had attempted to take a bath, but failing to master the rather complicated preliminaries, he had got into a machine without any of the numerous tickets, and the *baigneur*, after vainly trying to inform him that he must go back and book his *cabane*, *peignoir*, *serviette*, and *costume*, by separate processes, and then present himself anew, was reduced to ordering him out of the machine in unmistakable pantomime; whereupon the Englishman had retreated under cover of a volley of Hindustani, and turned disgustedly up the nearest street. 'What was that fool in the red flannel driving at, I wonder,' he was thinking; 'I should have hoped I was respectable enough to be allowed to bathe in their beastly sea without producing my passport and certificate of birth, and the Lord knows what!'

The heat in the narrow streets was oppressive; the gutters exhaled a succession of odours that were not refreshing, the pavements were bare, for all the usual loiterers were away at Deauville; the proprietors of the shops where 'Articles de Paris' were sold were asleep in their muslined and mirrored back-parlours; the *dame du comptoir* at the confectioner's was dozing over her feuilleton; the waiters in the green-shuttered cafés were sleeping with their heads laid on the marble-topped tables. As the wanderer passed a private house where windows opened upon the street, he had a view of a gaudy little room, all ormolu and floral tapestry, with a stout bourgeois and his poodle slumbering peacefully on opposite armchairs. The only sounds that broke the hot stillness were the click of billiard balls, or rattle of dominoes from the upper rooms of restaurants, the drowsy tinkle of a *pension* piano, or the peevish jingle of bells whenever one of the fly-horses on the place shook his long-suffering and sheepskinned head.

At the little circulating library where English was spoken, but not understood, yesterday's London papers had not yet come in. The Englishman had smoked all his own cigars, and mistrusted, not unjustly, those produced under the fostering care of the French government. He was absolutely without resources, being one of those persons who soon exhaust the pleasure of novelty.

Walking idly along in that unenviable mood in which each change of direction seems more wearisome, Mr. Joshua Chadwick, as his name was, fell into a somewhat bitter and sombre train of thought.

'Upon my soul,' he was saying inwardly, 'for all the acquaintances I've made, or am likely to make in this hole, I might as well be back at one of the old Furredpore concerns at once—better, for I could do as I pleased there. It does seem an extraordinary thing that with so many English people at the hotel I haven't found a soul to speak to. They stuck me between a pair of Frenchmen at every *table d'hôte* except last night, and then I didn't get on much better—that woman with the grey hair wouldn't talk. I wonder if Liversedge has been telling them about me. It's likely enough. I was pretty short with him when he came up to me with some eyewash or other about our being neighbours at Gorsecombe now, and hoping we should be friends. "If I wasn't good enough for you in Bengal," I said, "I'm not good enough for you here." I've never forgiven him that day he came to dine with me at the factory, and found a ryot—an obstinate old devil who wouldn't sow a single beegah of his fields in indigo—locked up in the go-down. Anybody else would have taken no notice, seeing he was my guest; but Liversedge had me up and fined me, and made me let the nigger out too. That was the last time he ever dined with me while he was in the district. But what could he say against me here? Only that I wasn't as steady as I might have been. Who was there out there to care how I lived? Who will care now when I'm rich and turned respectable? Respectable! yes, I've got some object in keeping respectable now, for the boy's sake.'

Joshua Chadwick's career had been a singularly hard and unsuccessful one till quite lately. Twenty-two years before he was in his father's business with every prospect of a speedy partnership. Then he had committed the offence which had led to his expulsion; he had married one of the assistants employed in the establishment—an imprudence which the old man could not forgive.

Chadwick had gone out to Calcutta; his father's business lay in Oriental goods generally, and he expected that one of the banks there, with whom their house had dealings, might be inclined to help him, as proved to be the case.

The bank, like many Indian banks, owned silk and indigo factories in various districts, and to one of them young Chadwick was sent as assistant-manager. At that time he was rather of the type of 'good young man,' brought up in a strict Dissenting circle, an active Christian of a somewhat exuberant class,—energetic, emotional, fond of power. To be persecuted for doing right was gratifying; he went out with a light heart to make a home for his young wife, and gain riches in spite of the parental edict. He happened to reach the Indigo plantation in the very height of the disputes between planters, ryots, and missionaries, and his avowed leaning to the latter did not make him more popular with his fellow-planters. He was not a man with any graces of manner, nor was he accustomed to society; he lived much to himself, and put by all that he could save from his salary towards the home he was planning. Then came the news which made him an altered man; his wife had died, leaving him with an infant son whom he had never seen. He grew morose and overbearing, fell out with his only friends, the missionaries, and presently became notorious for his high-handed dealings with the natives. Later, when he was transferred to a concern in another part of the country, he threw off every restraint and lived in a manner which made it impossible for married planters at all events to associate with him. He managed to save enough to buy a share in the factory; but the Indigo interest in Bengal was slowly declining, and after long years of struggle against refractory ryots and bad seasons, Chadwick had been glad to sell out for what he could, and the Bank had helped him to purchase a factory in Behar, where the prospects of making a living were more favourable.

In Behar he had at last begun to prosper, but there, too, his life was no more reputable than before; his unsociable manners and irregular habits excluded him from such society as was to be had, and Chadwick was perfectly content to be so excluded.

All this time he had not heard from his father, and but rarely of his son, for whose support he had sent over small remittances from time to time, but the fact that he had cost his mother's life possibly turned his heart against him from the first, for he felt no real interest in the boy.

At last he heard, through the Calcutta Bank, that his father was dead, and afterwards, to his utter astonishment, that he had relented and left his only son a half share in a very handsome fortune. Thereupon he had left his plantation to the care of an agent, and returned to his native land, with a sense that his altered position had brought new responsibilities, that he must leave sack and live cleanly in future. So far, however, neither his money nor his studious regard for the proprieties had procured him the footing he had expected in his native land. At Gorsecombe, the village in Pineshire, where his father had built himself a country house, he had not found himself at all cordially welcomed by the local society. Even here at Trouville, his fellow countrymen seemed to have combined to relegate him to the enjoyment of his own society. Once, in his reckless revolt against conventions, he would have been resigned enough, but the isolation one achieves is very different from that which is thrust upon one, and Chadwick resented being treated as an outsider in this way.

He did not make sufficient allowance for the natural suspicion and exclusiveness of the travelling Englishman, or the tendency of a clique when once formed to be chary of admitting others into its circle. And then, too, by a merciful law of nature which ordains that none of us can know exactly what impression we produce upon an unbiassed mind, he did not realise that his appearance was not in itself a recommendation.

Chadwick was a big man with a face coarsely and floridly coloured, bronzed by the sun, seamed and lined by hard living; he had strangely excitable-looking light-grey eyes, and a large loose sensual mouth; he was not positively ill-looking, nor was his expression bad, though to a fastidious sense there was something overpowering about the whole man which did not encourage advances.

'I suppose,' he said, continuing his meditations, 'I could find ways of passing my time at a place like this, if I chose to look about me—but there's the boy to be thought of now. I'll give the other thing a chance. Perhaps it's been my fault after all. I've been expecting other people to make up to me, instead of meeting them half-way myself. I'll go back to that hotel, and have another try.'

Strong in this new resolution, he struck up a little street under huge white calico banners advertising pianos for hire, and up between high walls and staring doll's-house-like villas, until he reached the Hôtel Californie, a large unbeautiful pile as architecturally characterless and pretentious as most hotels.

No one was in the big entrance hall except Mr. Liversedge, who was asleep on one of the divans, a couple of enormously stout foreigners, a husband and wife, who were sitting side by side on another, panting like overdriven cattle. Through the glass screen at the end he could see the heads of the group on the terrace outside. He looked a moment through the glass doors, and then his nerve failed him—it required more moral courage than he possessed just then in spite of his resolve to go out and sit amongst them, and risk an unmistakable snub by joining in the conversation.

'I don't feel up to tackling the lot of 'em,' he thought, and went out again and round by a lower path to a terrace immediately under and out of sight of the balcony, where he might find an opportunity of cultivating the acquaintance of a solitary Briton.

On this terrace, which led up to the balcony or upper terrace by a double flight of steps and was laid out with shrubs and benches, Fortune favoured Mr. Chadwick even beyond his hopes, for, although there was no portly paterfamilias or sociable bachelor there, upon one of the seats sat a girl of about eighteen or nineteen, evidently English, and with something much more than the mere prettiness of youth and health. He remembered that she had sat on the other side of his unresponsive neighbour of the *table-d'hôte*, who was probably her mother, and the mere facts that she was absorbed in a book and that he had not been in any way introduced were no reasons, with him, for not addressing her. If he could succeed in getting on good terms with her, he thought, she would smooth his way for him with the rest of the English set; at any rate, it was worth trying, and so he drew up a chair, and sat by her bench for a minute or so in silence.

Miss Chevening's face had disturbed the peace of mind of more than one who still found it as impossible to recall it accurately as to forget it. Her expression was constantly shifting with every change of feeling, like a child's, and every change gave a new meaning and character to her features. Her hazel eyes could rest on you with the serenest and most mortifying indifference, or shine with a frank sweet friendliness that was a patent of distinction in itself for the recipient. Her beautiful flexible mouth had an habitual curve of slight disdain, her manner to people who did not interest her was apt to be curt, and, to those who provoked her anger, merciless. She was impulsive and outspoken at times, particularly in her dislikes; she was fastidiously intolerant of commonplace, of boredom. At school she had been made the unwilling object of passionate homage from enthusiastic school-girls, and she had laughed at them pitilessly, though sometimes condescending to make use of their devotion. As yet, those who knew her best would have found it hard to say positively whether she had a heart or not, in the metaphorical sense of the word, if it had not been for the affection she showed for the younger members of her own family.

All this does not perhaps constitute a very lovable character, and it must be admitted that Miss Chevening's virtues and amiability had never made her friends at all apprehensive of her early decease, but a lovely face and form atone for many shortcomings, and gain for their possessor a regard often as little deserved as sought.

Perhaps the past had done something to embitter her view of the world. She had been singularly beautiful from her childhood, and had always been accustomed to be made much of, especially at country-houses, where she frequently accompanied her father and mother on visits, and obtained a precocious knowledge of society.

She had been expensively educated at a fashionable watering-place school, and although Colonel Chevening had been ordered out to Afghanistan in the meanwhile, and was killed at Maiwand when Margot was sixteen, he left his widow fairly well off, and there seemed no reason why his daughters should not take their natural place in society when they were of an age to come out.

Unhappily, Mrs. Chevening, who was at once ambitious and extravagant, conceived the idea of increasing her income by speculation—with results that may be easily imagined. She had to give up her house in Chesham Place, and find another large enough for her family and at a rent suitable to her reduced means, and, tempted by its cheapness, she took one of the old houses which are to be found along the river bank between Chiswick and Hammersmith. Perhaps she had expected that her friends would find her out there; or perhaps, in the first bitterness of her reverses, she had been glad of a retreat; at all events, she found herself deserted by all her former set. Chiswick was too long a drive for them, and they soon forgot, first her address and then her existence. Mrs. Chevening having chosen to take offence at a neglect which she might have expected, had made no effort to keep up her relations with her smart friends, and the consequence was that Margot, at a time when, had all gone well, she would have been presented to her Sovereign and launched into her first London season, was living the life of any young lady of the middle-class who had never aspired to society.

Her devoted school-girl friends had come out and forgotten her; her aunt, Lady Yaverland, who had daughters of her own, considered her duty to her niece and sister-in-law sufficiently fulfilled by a card for an afternoon concert at Portman Square in the winter.

One or two families at Bedford Park or Kew, and in the sleepy old-world mansions which still resist the onset of modern bricks and mortar, formed their only acquaintances now; and Miss Chevening's social distractions were all of the mildest suburban order—a garden-party, the lawn tennis club in summer, a carpet-dance or two in winter.

As a rule she was something more than resigned; she liked the old-fashioned creeper-covered house by the river; she had been more closely drawn to her sisters and brother by their altered circumstances, and the best side of her nature was reserved for them, which is not invariably the case; but Margot had a proud conviction in the superiority of her own family.

Nevertheless there were times when she felt a vague discontent, when she longed for a larger horizon than the one which lay before her. Memories still lingered of the days when the wheels of her life had run with luxurious smoothness; when, child as she was, she had been surrounded with flatteries and pleasures. She was as disposed for the pleasure now as then; she could not help knowing that she had an even better title to the homage; yet the world in which she had once thought to move knew her not, and probably would never know her.

It was this consciousness of being shut out from circles in which she was capable of shining which gave her something of the bearing of a banished princess, who found everything in her meaner estate endurable but its pleasures.

This was the girl with whom Joshua Chadwick had somewhat rashly determined to ingratiate himself; and even he, though not a diffident man in most respects, seemed to feel that there was something rather formidable about the undertaking.

CHAPTER II

BREAKING THE ICE

At length Chadwick conquered his hesitation and began: 'I hope I'm not disturbing you, sitting here?' he said.

The girl on the bench lifted her eyes for a moment with a slight surprise, and then said indifferently, 'Not in the least,' and returned to her book.

'You seem interested in what you are reading?'

'Very.' This time she did not raise her eyes.

'Might I inquire the subject?'

With a charming negligent gesture she held the book towards him so that he might read the title.

'"Sesame and Lilies," eh? A work on Horticulture, I presume?'

'Yes,' said Miss Chevening, with a fine contempt for accuracy.

'Ah, the only plant *I've* had any experience of is indigo.'

She did not conceive herself called upon to return any answer to this.

'Yes,' he continued, 'I ought to know something about indigo. I've spent more than twenty years of my life trying to make a living out of it—hard work it was, too, and yet it doesn't seem such a bad time now to look back on. I miss it now I'm out of it all.'

He was silent for a moment; again he saw the coolies beating the blue-green liquid in the great vat to a milky froth, and smelt the pleasant fresh scent of the dye; for an instant he was back in the old life, with all its risks, contests, and hopes; an autocrat in his factory, a terror to villagers who shirked their sowing. Then the vision faded again, and he was only a friendless Englishman abroad, trying to induce a monosyllabic young woman to talk to him.

Her continued inattention exasperated him into saying, 'I should have thought it wouldn't have done you any harm to put down your book for a few minutes and be sociable; I'm not a great talker myself, but it does seem hard to have been here two days, with plenty of my fellow-countrymen about, and not a civil word from one of them all the time!'

She closed her book resignedly; she did not intend to let him drive her away, and she saw that, unconventional as his manners were, he did not mean to be offensive. Perhaps, after all, it might amuse her for a short while to let him talk; he was a new type, and at least he was not commonplace, like most people.

'I am quite willing to listen to you,' she said, 'if you have anything to say.'

'That's more than anyone else has been yet,' he answered. 'Why, the other day at *table d'hôte* I passed a man the salt, and he was so afraid of its leading to anything, that he said "Mercy, m'siew," knowing as well that I wasn't French as I did he was English. I call that small-minded, don't you?'

'Perhaps it was only shyness. Englishmen are rather noted for being reserved, aren't they?'

'*I'm* not reserved,' he said; 'if anyone wants to know who I am and what I am I'm quite willing to tell him. I've no reason for concealing it. But half the people you meet are so mortally afraid of compromising themselves by making acquaintances. There's one comfort, I shan't be lonely very long—my boy comes in a day or two, he'll be company for me.'

'Is he crossing from England, then?'

'No; he's been travelling about the Continent, and I thought I'd go over and meet him at one of these French seaside places, and we'd enjoy ourselves a bit together before we went back. *My* father didn't give me such opportunities when I was young; he was a hard man, turned me adrift for marrying against his wishes, and there was I, all the best years of my life, toiling to make more than a bare living out in Bengal. I couldn't do much for my son in those days—all the money I could spare went towards purchasing a share in a concern, or paying off loans, or meeting losses. However, my father came round before he died, and I'm a rich man now and able to make it up to my boy. He's a good boy, too, and considering how short a time we've known one another, it's surprising how we've taken to each other. He'll want for nothing now. I'm a richer man than I ever hoped to be—a richer man than most down in our parts, and my son shall have a better time of it than I had.'

Most of Miss Chevening's interest had been exhausted by this time. Chadwick did not improve on acquaintance; she did not care to be the recipient of these sudden confidences, and found his rough swagger rather more trying than she had anticipated. She was distinctly relieved, therefore, to see her mother coming towards them from the upper terrace.

'So here you are, Margot!' exclaimed Mrs. Chevening. 'I have been looking for you everywhere.'

'Your daughter, ma'am,' said Chadwick, 'has been giving me the pleasure of her society down here.'

'Indeed?' she said coldly. 'Margot, I have brought you two letters from Littlehampton; they were lying on the portier's table as I came through.'

'Oh, at last!' cried Miss Chevening, all her languor suddenly becoming animation; 'give them to me please. . . . From Ida! Mother, look—two whole sheets; she must be really better!'

'Pray don't let us detain you here,' said Mrs. Chevening to Joshua Chadwick, who showed no inclination to go.

'You're not detaining *me*—I've only too much time on my hands,' he declared.

'Then I suppose it is we who must find some other place,' said Mrs. Chevening. 'Come, Margot.'

'Oh!' he said, clumsily, 'I'll go. I didn't know I was intruding; thought the hotel grounds were free to all. But I can easily go somewhere else, since I'm in the way here. Good afternoon.'

'*What* a terrible person!' murmured Mrs. Chevening, as she sat down by her daughter's side. 'You haven't really been allowing him to have any conversation with you, Margot, have you?'

'Ida drove to Worthing on Saturday, and wasn't in the least tired,' was the irrelevant reply.

'Dear pet—*so* glad! but you didn't hear my question, I think. Were you talking to that dreadful man?'

'Oh, a little,—yes. At least he talked to me—he told me things.'

'Margot, how very imprudent you are;—now we shall find it very difficult to make him keep his distance! What did he tell you?'

'They have been twice to Arundel,' Miss Chevening announced from her letter. 'Were you asking me something? Oh, well, he told me that he had been an indigo-planter, out in Bengal, I think he said. And about his son, who is coming to meet him here soon. And how he was immensely rich, and could buy anything he took a fancy to—he was very full of his wealth—and how no one here would speak to him, which he seemed to take to heart. I think that was about all.'

'He seems to have been very confidential,' said Mrs. Chevening, whose displeasure seemed to have already evaporated.

'I couldn't help it, dear. I don't think I was at all encouraging.'

'Well, tell me what Ida says.'

'I'll read you the end of her letter:—

'"I can't tell you what a perfect time we are having here. Reggie and Lettice are running about on the sands all day, and have the most fearful appetites. You can't think how sweet dear Hennie has been all the time we have been here—really more like a sister than a governess! I wish you liked her more than you do, because I think she feels that a good deal. I often think of you and wonder if you are enjoying yourselves—it must be such fun being in a big hotel; I suppose you have a dance every night almost? Be sure and tell me if you see anything very striking—in the costumes I mean, of course. Hennie has two lovely gowns, and looks quite pretty in them. One is a,"—and so on—'"Don't you think my writing is getting like yours—it isn't nearly so schoolgirly as it used to be, is it?"'

'Miss Henderson seems to me much too fond of dress for a woman in her position,' remarked Mrs. Chevening; 'I shall really have to speak to her about it when we get home. You don't care about her very much, do you, Margot?'

'I think she's rather silly in some things; but Ida's devoted to her; she couldn't bear to part with her now.'

'I wish I could have afforded some one who was a little more— But we have to be so careful about what we spend now,' sighed Mrs. Chevening.

'You know I help as much as I can with the two younger ones,' said Margot, 'but I've no genius for teaching, and I don't know nearly so much as Miss Henderson in most things. Reggie is quite beyond me. But I must read you Lettice's epistle—she has a style which is all her own:—

'"My dear beloved Margot,—We all like little-hampton exsessively, it is the greediest place we have ever been to, and we have such glorius apetits. Reggie and I bild the most beutiful subteranean cavuns in the sand, for pirits. We have not seen a pirit yet to speak to, but there is a very plesant costgard along the cliffs. Reggie and I had afternoon tea with him yesterday in his cottage, and he showed us all his meddles—we are going again soon."' ('I shall write to Miss Henderson, and beg her to be very careful where she allows those children to go,' said Mrs. Chevening at this point. 'I dare say she would draw the line at pirates,' said Margot, laughing, 'though I believe Lettice would go to tea with Captain Kidd himself if she was invited.')

'"Yarrow sends his love; he is very well. We have only just forgiven him for killing a little rabit. Reggie is taming the sweetest little teeny crab, he is going to train it to come when he calls, and to walk strate; he says he shall do it all by kindness. It can lie on its back and play at being dead so prettily, but we don't know who tort it that. I have a lot of new drawings to show you. Some are Nativities and Anunciations, and some are mistical."' ('What does the child mean?' exclaimed her mother. 'Didn't you know?' said Margot. 'Lettice has been mad about the Old Masters ever since she was taken to the National Gallery; she imitates their subjects now in lead pencil, and would be dreadfully hurt if anyone thought they were funny. I never trust myself to do more than glance at them.')

' "I have done a Masterdom of Saint Sibastion, which is the best I have ever done, and *very* good. The day before yesterday Hennie and Ida went to Wurthing, so Reggie and I were left alone. We walked along the prominade and pretended we could see you and mother over in France waving hankychifs to us. Yesterday nothing hapened except the arival of a bun-loaf about tea-time. Reggie says he can't bother to write, so I'm to send an apolijy. Isn't my speling very much impruved? Do come back soon. I think littlehampton must be ever so much more emusing than France is." '

' Peebles for pleasure!' remarked Margot at Lettice's opinion on the comparative merits of France and Littlehampton. 'She is the quaintest darling. But Trouville really is beginning to pall a little, dear, don't you think? Mightn't we finish our holiday with them?'

'You are a most incomprehensible girl,' said Mrs. Chevening. 'I thought, after all the anxiety and worry of Ida's illness, it would be a pleasant change for you—this continental life—and you are tired of it already.'

'I am a little tired of the Californie, I think,' said Margot; 'the people are not very interesting, and we hardly ever go out of the hotel, do we?'

'I don't care about sight-seeing,' said Mrs. Chevening; 'and there is the Casino.'

'Oh, the Casino, yes!' replied Margot, with a little pout, for Mrs. Chevening, although she took out the full value of her sixty francs' *abonnement*, did not patronise any entertainment that could not be seen without extra payment. Margot would have liked to see more of the surrounding country, to visit some of the sleepy little towns and the old homely churches, where the walls were covered with tokens of naïve and often touching devotion, and votive ships hung from the dim rafters; but her mother's tastes did not lie in this direction—she was content to oscillate between the *plage* and the Casino, and seemed to find perfect satisfaction in the rather microscopic talk of the Spokers and Whipples and their set.

Mrs. Chevening had sent Margot up to make her preparations for the *table d'hôte*, and sat for a time absorbed in meditations which, to judge by her expression, were not of a cheerful character, and which, using an author's privilege, I may indicate more fully. 'It was a mistake to come here,' she was telling herself, 'a mere waste of money. If I had taken her to Whitby, or Cowes, or Folkestone, we should have met people worth knowing, some of my old set perhaps—but *here!* Yet how could I tell? the very best people go to Trouville some seasons; it only happens that this year they've chosen to stay away. Perhaps,' and here she broke into a bitter little smile, 'it would have made very little difference even if they were here. What young man with a name and position would look at a penniless girl, though she's as lovely as Margot? I was a fool to think of it, and yet it would break my heart if she were to marry some third-rate young actor or government clerk, and settle down for life in Bedford Park or Shepherd's Bush. She ought to marry a rich man, if only for the sake of the other children. Oh, if poor dear Hamilton had only been spared, how different it all might have been! And Gwendolen, who might have brought her out and done everything for her, if she only would— But she's afraid of Margot interfering with her own girl's chances. I dare say not without reason, for all those Bradings are as plain as pestles. I wonder,' and here her thoughts were too disjointed and enigmatic to be capable of being put into words, but at the end of a long reverie she rose, and said aloud, 'Wasn't somebody saying that Mr. Liversedge knew all about him? it might be worth while finding out.'

Mr. Liversedge was an ex-civil servant who had been high up in the service; he was now a gossiping old bachelor with nothing to do but flutter about from one watering place to another, and tell stories spiced with a *pot-pourri* of Eastern scandal. Cheltenham, Leamington, the Riviera, and the Oriental Club knew him well, and now he had come to Trouville with his hoary head and his hoarier stories, to see whether 'the fleeting remnant of his liver' would be benefited by Norman air. He spent most of his evenings in playing an Indian variety of 'Patience' in the *salon de lecture*, and would occasionally offer to instruct the prettiest married woman (for he had a wholesome dread of girls and widows) in the mysteries of the game. He had rather mistrusted Mrs. Chevening at first, and had been careful to parade his anti-nuptial opinions, but his alarm had now abated. She found him stretched at full length on a divan in the hall, waiting for the dinner gong, and he was easily induced to tell her all he knew about the stranger in the pith helmet.

‘Curious,’ he said, ‘how the fellows you don’t care to meet *will* crop up at the most unlikely places. I knew this Chadwick soon after I joined my first appointment. He was managing a factory in my division, and I was brought in contact with him occasionally. He was the only planter about there I didn’t get on with—violent, overbearing fellow—not a man you could know at all. I dare say he was soured by the way he’d been treated. Father had those big shops in Wigmore Street—Oriental warehouses—carpets, Indian wares, *you* know ’em. Well, this man fell in love with one of the young ladies in the establishment and married her. The old man was a very strict and proper old gentleman, with great ideas of class distinctions, so he turned his son out of the business, out of the home, and country too, for marrying beneath him. The wife died soon after, before she could come out and join her husband, and after that he didn’t seem to care what he did. I had some trouble with him, and we were very stand-off for some time. I got a collectorship in the Moorshedabad district; flattered myself I’d seen the last of him. Not a bit of it, he turned up as planter then on his own account—quieter, I must say, but still—well, he didn’t care to make himself popular with the people there. I got transferred again, and—well, to make a long story short, I retired about two years ago, and after wandering about a little, settled down at Gorsecombe, and whom do I find there but this identical man! It appears the old Chadwick, after living for years over his place of business, suddenly took it into his head to build a house for himself in the country. When he died he left the house and half his property, a half share in the business, which they tell me represents an enormous sum—he left all this to our friend, who naturally allowed his indigo to look after itself and came over to his new kingdom—and here he is, worth, well—a good many more lacs than I shall ever be!'

'And has he no family?' asked Mrs. Chevening—'no one to share all this good fortune.'

'One son,' said Liversedge. 'I've never happened to come across him while I was at the Bungalow—my place at Gorsecombe—but he must be a fine young fellow by this time. I forget whether I heard that the old grandfather took him up and had him educated or not.'

'Very likely,' said Mrs. Chevening; 'it would be the least he could do. But how very odd that you should go on meeting this Mr. Chadwick like that.'

'Even here, you see, I've not escaped him—went out day before yesterday, and the first thing I saw was his confounded old sun-helmet! However, I keep out of his way. I don't want to have more than I can help to do with the man.'

'Well,' said Mrs. Chevening, 'I don't know whether it is the way you have told the story, but, do you know, *I* feel quite interested in him, poor man!'

How nearly, she mused, she had thrown away what, for anything she knew, might prove the very opportunity she was in search of! To think that she had been discouraging advances from a wealthy planter, with an only son who was expected to arrive shortly! How unwise it was, how wrong, indeed, to be governed by first impressions. The father was not prepossessing, it was true, but it did not at all follow that his son would resemble him. On the contrary, it was likely enough that he would possess an education and accomplishments suitable to his expectations. And if this young man were to make Margot's acquaintance, might not the happiest results be expected? It was a chance at all events, and one she could not afford to neglect; at whatever sacrifice to her private feelings, this Mr. Chadwick must be cultivated. Had she gone too far to make this possible now? She remembered the man's loneliness, his evident desire for companionship of some sort—no, it would not be difficult to conciliate him. But it must be done without delay; if she waited until the son appeared, it might be too late. It was an unpleasant necessity, especially after the opinions she had pronounced, but that could not be helped. 'So long as it turns out well,' she concluded, 'what need I care what the people here choose to think?'

And, as a preliminary measure, she set herself deliberately to forget all that she had said and thought which was at variance with her new departure,—such act of oblivion being a mental fact that no renegade can safely omit.

CHAPTER III

A HIGH-HANDED PROCEEDING

'I THINK your manner is a little too inclined to be forbidding, Margot,' remarked her mother as they were walking down to the Casino later in the evening; 'it is almost as serious a mistake for a young girl to make as the opposite extreme—it really is!'

'What have I done now, dear?' inquired Miss Chevening, with lifted eyebrows.

'Well, you were so very "snubby" to that poor Mr. Chadwick at *table d'hôte*, I really felt bound to make some amends to him.'

'Is Mr. Chadwick the horrid man who would talk to me down on the terrace?'

'We have no right to condemn any fellow-creature as horrid on so slight an acquaintance,' enunciated Mrs. Chevening. 'I often think we miss making many pleasant and valuable friendships, Margot, simply because we will be so exclusive.'

'I thought I was so imprudent to encourage him—not that I ever dreamed of such a thing—a little time ago!'

'That is very different. I knew nothing of him then. I like him, Margot, I *quite* like him. Of course one sees he is not just like other people, but a little unconventionality is so refreshing. And he seems so lonely here, it is only kind to take some notice of him.'

'Well, you will see,' predicted Miss Chevening; 'you have raised him, dear, but you won't find it so easy to lay him again—we shall be always seeing that dreadful helmet bearing down on us now.'

'I think,' said her mother with great dignity, 'you may trust me to check any encroachment, and, let me tell you, it is the worst possible style to adopt that contemptuous tone. We are all made of the same flesh, remember, all erring mortals—here to-day and gone to-morrow.'

'Ah, but he *won't* be gone to-morrow,' said Margot, who did not relish the moralising turn of the conversation; 'he's waiting for his son.'

'Did he tell you what the son was doing?' said Mrs. Chevening—'travelling about Normandy, seeing all the old towns and great cathedrals—such a nice thing for a young man to care about—seeing cathedrals—I think. Shows such refined tastes. But then he has seen so little of his father all these years.'

'You evidently think that accounts for it,' remarked Miss Chevening maliciously.

'I did not say anything of the kind. Mr. Chadwick is a very pleasant person in his way, but his son is likely to have had more advantages in education and training—one so often sees that. He seems such an affectionate father too.'

'Is the son married as well, then?' said Margot, who happened to be in a provoking mood.

'You are a little dull to-night, dear,—or is it only inattentive? Married! why, he is quite a boy, twenty-one or so.'

'Boys of twenty-one or so do marry,' said Margot.

'Well, this one is *un*married, and I was of course speaking of the father; he is very proud of his son, Margot, I could see.'

'Is he?' was all Miss Margot could be induced to reply, and the conversation dropped. Nevertheless she retained an unpleasant impression of that *table d'hôte*; it had both puzzled and pained her that her mother's treatment of the obnoxious Mr. Chadwick should have undergone so marked a change. She was angry, too, at the complacency with which Mrs. Chevening's advances had been met, and the sudden and alarming development from a mere *table-d'hôte* conversation to an established acquaintanceship. Mrs. Chevening, of course, had made no allusion to her recent frigidity, striving rather to render it speedily forgotten, and she had been only too successful. Margot's pride was sorely wounded that her mother had so compromised her dignity; and though she was at a loss to guess her motive, she knew instinctively that it was very far from being mere good nature or compassion.

Her presentiment that Mr. Chadwick would follow up the advantage was amply fulfilled; he stuck to them during the next few days with a persistency that was almost pathetic: they could go nowhere without the certainty of his turning up at some unexpected point, and, much as Margot chafed under the infliction, her mother endured and even encouraged it.

Under her ægis he gained admission into the English set at the 'Californie,' and his social quarantine was ended; but he attached himself chiefly to Mrs. Chevening, which had the effect of throwing Margot very much upon her own society.

It was on the third day of this unaccountable friendship that her mother said, 'Margot, Mr. Chadwick is very anxious that we should go over to Deauville Races with him to-morrow, it's the last day; and he is expecting his son this evening, so we shall be a party of four.'

'No, mother, really,' she protested; 'I don't in the least want to go—you must leave me out.'

'Don't be childish, Margot—*selfish* I should say—for if *you* won't go, I must stay here with you, of course.'

'I don't see why; but surely a whole afternoon without Mr. Chadwick's companionship will be a little half-holiday for us? I know it will be so for me.'

'It was most good-natured of him to wish us to come with him, and I can't hurt his feelings by refusing. Besides, I have promised for you.'

'I wish you would tell me what there is about Mr. Chadwick that you should encourage him as you do—he seems to me a rather objectionable person. Surely, mother, you must feel that he isn't—well, quite our equal in some ways.'

'I detest that way of speaking,' said Mrs. Chevening sharply. 'Are you aware that we are little better than paupers?'

'We are not too poor to choose our acquaintances, surely. I own to preferring people who have an average amount of refinement. You are generally more exacting than I am.'

'You choose to look down on poor Mr. Chadwick because he has not acquired a mere varnish of manner; you forget that he has spent his life under great disadvantages, Margot, and I see nothing so very unpresentable about him, after all. But you need not see more of him than you wish to-morrow, his son will be there to amuse you.'

'If he is at all like his father, he will not amuse me. Oh, mother, can't you see that I would very much rather stay at home!'

'I confess I don't understand you. I should have thought a girl, especially one who has had so few pleasures as you have, would be glad enough to go, for the mere spectacle.'

Margot allowed this remark to pass in silence, though there was the least little curl of disdain at the corners of her full lips which sufficiently indicated her thoughts.

It was a chilly evening, and they were taking their after-dinner coffee in the big entrance hall, instead of upon the terrace as usual. For once they were alone together; Mr. and Mrs. Spoker were rocking on two American chairs side by side at some distance, bickering languidly; Mr. Whipple and Mr. Chadwick were smoking on the terrace below with turned-up collars; Mr. Liversedge, stretched at full length on one of the divans opposite the Chevenings, was engrossed in the workings of his digestive organs, and the rest of their set were scattered in various directions about the hotel. The foreign element was represented by the stout couple who had scarcely breath enough for respiration and none at all to devote to conversational purposes, and by one dejected stranger who was pacing monotonously up and down the matting.

'Don't you think we might be going down to the Casino?' said Margot at last; 'they are at least awake there.'

Mrs. Chevening assented, and they were about to go up for hats and wraps, when the sharp jingle of grelots was heard outside, and immediately afterwards the great black and red omnibus of the hotel drew up to the entrance, its lamps blazing in the dusk.

The gold-laced porter came out of his lair on one side, the dignified manageress left her bureau on the other, and prepared to receive the latest arrivals.

'Wait one moment,' said Mrs. Chevening; 'I must see who have come, and if they look as if they would be at all nice.'

There was only one passenger in the omnibus, and Margot could see him distinctly from where she was sitting near the bureau. He was an Englishman evidently, and young—a tall broad-shouldered fellow, with close-cut curling dark hair, and strong, rather stern features; a very favourable specimen of the young

Englishman whom a public school and university training has turned out well both mentally and physically.

'Mr. Chadwick on the terrace?' she heard him say. 'Very well; if you'll have my things taken up to my room, I'll go and find him at once.'

He passed close to her with a brisk, easy step, and her eyes followed him involuntarily, though he did not appear to have noticed her. Where had he gained that air of mingled power and refinement? how did it come that plebeian-looking Mr. Chadwick had a son like that? it upset Miss Chevening's views on descent, which were of a decidedly conservative cast; he must have inherited his features and bearing from the mother's side, she concluded.

'I wonder,' said Mrs. Chevening, 'if that young man could have been the son Mr. Chadwick is expecting.'

'Which young man?' was the hypocritical rejoinder; evidently Mrs. Chevening had not overheard him inquiring for Mr. Chadwick, and Margot did not choose to enlighten her. But later in the evening, as they were leaving the concert-room at the Casino, she said, 'I suppose, after all, I had better go with you to Deauville to-morrow, mother. I couldn't let you go alone very well.'

'I was sure you would be sensible about it, my love,' said Mrs. Chevening; 'and you will see you will have a very pleasant afternoon, if you only make up your mind to enjoy yourself.'

Margot smiled to herself; she was feeling tolerably certain that she would have no reason to complain of boredom.

She stood some time at her open window that evening, looking down on the wide crescent of lights along the *plage*, with the green and red lanterns of the lighthouses on the pier and the electric haze above the Casino, and it seemed as if the place were invested with a new beauty for her, and she felt a dreamy pleasure in listening for the long, languid roll of the waves as they broke below in the silence. She did not care to analyse the causes for this change—she despised school-girl sentiment, and would have felt something like shame in admitting that a passing glimpse of a stranger could account for this difference; but nevertheless she found herself dwelling with a vague anticipation upon the fact that she would meet him on the morrow, and the probability that she would see him rather frequently during the next few days. There was something in his face which had interested her at once; he looked older by some years than the age her mother had mentioned, an age at which many are still raw and undeveloped boys. Margot had met many of these latter at tennis parties and dances, and never cared to perceive their open admiration, but already she was anxious that this acquaintance who was to be should not be totally indifferent to her. Her former antipathy to his father seemed unreasonable, she was grateful to him for his perseverance in cultivating them, and to her mother for her absence of prejudice in suffering him. Had her own wishes prevailed she would now have lost all chance of knowing the only man for whose acquaintance she felt the slightest desire.

She awoke early next morning with the same vague sense that something not disagreeable was about to happen. The day promised to be a very hot one; as she looked out she saw a veil of pearly mist receding from the waveless sea; a fishing smack with a sky-blue mainsail and red-ochre jib, repeated vividly in the glassy water, had just been towed to the head of the jetty by a string of fisherwomen, and was gliding gently out to sea. The sands were almost bare as yet, though the boarded promenade rang with the tramp of a few early risers. She felt impatient to be out too, and about an hour later, after the coffee and *petit-pain* which form one of the little luxuries of continental life, Margot was on her way across the planks, intending to walk through the market while the morning was cool. She was used to going about alone, and indeed would have had no chance of obtaining the exercise she loved if she had waited for her mother to accompany her. As she walked on, feeling an increased exhilaration with every breath of the pure morning air, she became a witness of a little scene which roused her to sudden anger.

Immediately in front of her was a small French boy, all striped collar and brown legs, who was being towed along with little vicious jerks by his nurse, not a *bonne* but a maiden from London, who had been engaged, no doubt, in order that the young gentleman might acquire an English accent of the utmost purity.

He was enjoying the fullest opportunities just then of extending his vocabulary, and Margot could hear her shrill rating some yards away. 'Oh, yes, indeed, it's likely, ain't it, as I'm gowin' wherever *you* please, my lord? All the world's got to give way to a little grizzlin' bag o' bones like you, is it? Well, *I* ain't goin' to be at your beck and call, and so I tell you—you'll just go wherever *I* want you to, and so you'd better make up your mind to it—jear me?'

'Good Maman said I may go attrapp the little crevettes and écrevisses, Suzanne.'

'Oh, I dessay—but you won't trapp no crevats nor yet no crevices to-day, so don't you put yourself out expectin' it. I've trouble enough with you as it is, without your messin' about with rocks and pools, I can tell yer. You come and sit quiet on the sands along o' me, and don't let me have none o' your contrariness, or I'll make you remember it when I gets you 'ome, so now!'

'You are not good for me, Suzanne. And when Maman comes, I shall tell it to her how you are not gentille du tout du tout!'

'Tell tiles, will yer? let me catch you making complynts against me, that's all—yer nasty little disagribble himp, yer!' And at this the nurse shook him violently.

Now one of Miss Chevening's characteristics was a caste prejudice which, though seldom exhibited, was almost as deeply rooted as a Brahmin's. She was never arrogant to dependents, but she looked upon them as a separate and inferior order, created for the convenience of their superiors, and this girl's coarse tyranny seemed to her an intolerable piece of presumption. She quickened her pace and stopped the nurse imperiously. 'How dare you speak in that insolent manner?' she demanded.

She looked magnificent as she stood there, her brows drawn to a line above her great hazel eyes, and a brighter flush staining her cheeks; the small boy glanced up at her in awe and admiration, as at some beautiful but hot-tempered angel who had flown down impulsively to protect him.

The nurse was less likely to be impressed by Margot's appearance, and tossed her head, remarking pertly that she supposed she was not under any obligation to account for what she said to strangers.

'You are under an obligation to treat your master's child in a proper manner,' said Margot.

Susan belonged to a type of nursemaid which is still not uncommon in London, as a stroll through Kensington Gardens may convince the sceptical at any time. Violent-tempered, coarse in grain, with no understanding of, if no actual dislike to children, she treated a charge exactly as she might the little brother Johnny or Billy she had dragged about the gutter in earlier days; her affection was as violent as her abuse, and she would have thought herself lowered by the least concession to a child's wishes. In appearance she was by no means a bad-looking girl, with reddish hair, a hot-tempered expression, and a figure which, though not short, was clumsy.

'It's likely as I'm to be made a slave of by a baby like that!' she cried.

'It did not seem as if you were the slave from the way you were talking,' said Miss Chevening with her haughtiest air. 'You were certainly not engaged to make a slave of him.'

'Whatever I was engaged for, I don't require to be taught my duties by you, miss,' said Susan. 'Come along, Master Onree, and don't let's take no notice o' what she says.'

'You had better listen,' said Miss Chevening, 'and you had better be civil. I am not at all sure that I ought not to find out who your mistress is, and let her know how her son is treated.'

Miss Susan's light eyes had no very pleasant look in them. At this threat, not being aware that the speaker was the very last person to execute it, she was subdued for the moment, however, and muttered something about trying to do her duty, and hoping the young lady would not make mischief.

'That will do,' said Margot. 'Little boy, what is your name?'

The little boy, apparently dazzled by the lovely imperious face that was bent down to his, made a little shrinking movement towards his nurse.

'He don't take to strangers, miss,' said Susan; 'there, Onree, the young lady ain't cross with you, only with poor Nana.'

‘Listen, Henri,’ said Margot in French, ‘if you want to go shrimping, you shall; you shall come and catch crevettes with me,’ and she held out her firm slim hand to be taken. What induced her to make this sudden proposition she could not have told; whether it was good-nature, or a perverse determination to conquer the boy's affections, or the desire to teach this girl a lesson, or all three combined.

‘I'm not going to trust that child out of my sight to please nobody,’ declared Susan, who had caught the tenor of the words.

‘I shall not ill-treat him at all events,’ replied Margot, ‘but you can follow us if you choose. Henri, you have a right to do what your mamma has given permission for. Susan is only your servant, do you understand? You mustn't be a little chicken of a boy. Have you got your net? very well, then, now we'll start.’

This little episode had an unseen hearer, for it had taken place on the edge of the planks near a small bathing shed, beside which sat a young man, who could scarcely have avoided hearing all that passed unless he had chosen to rise from his chair and walk away—which, as the conversation was not of a private nature and amused him, he saw no necessity to do.

The speakers themselves, however, were invisible to him and he to them, and as their voices died away he had the curiosity to get up and look after the figures that were moving towards the rocks.

The girl's voice—sweet, high-bred, and high-spirited

—had impressed him strongly; the distant glimpse he had of a slender tall figure appealed still further to his imagination; he wished he had been able to see her face. Long after he had returned to his chair he was absorbed in speculation as to what she would be like, whether he should be able to recognise her if they met, and other equally profitable subjects.

At last he could stay where he was no longer. 'They must have got past the Roches Noires by this time,' he mused; 'is the tide coming in or going out?' He went up to one of the slates which give such information—"*Haute Marée*, 10.45 A.M.," he read; 'it's past ten now. I wonder if they know that? if not, this is an awkward coast to be caught in. Suppose I stroll that way—it can do no harm at all events.'

. . . . . .

Miss Chevening had not gone very far with her small *protégé* before she found herself wondering what had possessed her to take charge of him, and wishing very heartily that she had left him to his own devices. Her fondness for children's society was largely dependent upon their ability to entertain her; little Henri seemed still mistrustful of her intentions towards him, which annoyed her, and, unlike French boys in general, he was painfully, obstinately shy. They reached the Black Rocks, where tiny crabs, apple-green, olive, and orange, scuttled across the ribbed sand with the air of persons late for an important appointment, but Henri showed no anxiety to capture one, making way for them to pass, on the contrary, with courtesy. ‘Faites attention, Mademoiselle,’ he would cry, and squeeze her hand tightly, while the shrimps, pellucid grey things that shot about in the pools or buried themselves in the sand, caused him a very languid excitement.

‘Regardez-moi ces petites bêtes-là!’ he exclaimed, and even suggested, ‘Dis donc, si nous poussions ici le filet?’ but nothing would induce him to handle them when they were hopping in the net—‘like jerky little wet ghosts,’ as Margot mentally likened them.

‘You seem rather afraid of shrimps,’ she remarked at last, ‘now you have come out to hunt them.’

‘They are damp, and they skip *à faire peur!*’ he complained; ‘they are ugly.’

‘The crabs are pretty, at all events,’ she said; ‘see if you can catch one and bring it to me to look at.’ He ran after one, but soon dropped it in dismay. ‘It is not pretty—it pinches,’ he announced with an injured expression.

‘I think if I were you, Henri, I would hunt only shells—they are quieter and not so dangerous, you know.’

‘Yes,’ he agreed, much relieved; ‘and they are really pretty. I will hunt shells.’

Margot began to find him wearisome; Susan, too, was a vexation to her—she stalked behind like a dismounted Black Care, in a sulk which was sighted for a long range. Miss Chevening ignored her entirely, but she could not help being aware that she was there, and noticing the propitiatory backward glances of her companion.

She exerted herself afresh to engage the boy's attention, for her self-love was concerned, but he would not be won, and she grew disgusted at last.

'It is not very polite of you, young man,' she said, 'to keep turning from me to look at Susan!'

'But she weeps!'

'Fiddle-de-dee!' said Margot; 'I forget the French for that—but Susan isn't weeping, and what if she were?'

'She is angry at me that I leave her, I am sure of it.'

'I believe you rather like being bullied after all. I want to make you stick up for yourself—do you understand that in English?—no, of course you don't. Remember this, you are a little gentleman and Susan is a servant; her anger—unless you are naughty (and you are too much of a little sheep ever to be that,' said Margot privately)—'her anger is nothing to you. Do you see?'

But he didn't see; he knew better than Margot that his nurse's temper made a considerable difference to his comfort. 'Let me run and tell her that I love her well.'

'Ah, I think you had better go back to her altogether—you are a very nicely behaved little boy, but, do you know? you are not amusing, so I'll give you up to your lawful guardian.' And she stopped for that injured person to come up, who, seeing that she was being waited for, lingered ostentatiously, with a show of deep interest in the horizon.

‘Susan,’ said Miss Chevening, carrying off her sense of defeat as well as she might, ‘Master Henri thinks he would like to go back now, so perhaps you will have the goodness to go with him, and treat him more kindly in future.’

But the child spoilt the whole effect of this admonition by running to the nurse and pulling her hand in his impatience to be gone—a fact of which Miss Susan was not slow to take advantage. ‘He knows who his friends are, you see, miss,’ she said; ‘you don’t go down with him for all your high and mightiness, he’s only frightened of you. Never mind, Onree dear, the cross young lady shan’t have you—we’ll leave her to herself.’

Margot did not deign to make any reply; she turned and continued her walk along the shore towards Villerville; she was angry at her failure, and a little downcast, too, but the salt air soon restored her serenity, as she went swiftly on, with her eyes on the line of white specks just visible above the curved dark blue sea, a line which was all there was to indicate the port of Havre.

Gradually she became aware of footsteps behind which seemed hurrying to overtake her. Glancing up at the low brown and green cliffs on her right, she saw no cabin or path in sight, but was too proud to look round or betray any alarm at being followed in such a lonely spot; she had not heard that Trouville sands were at all frequented by footpads, but she was not quite comfortable notwithstanding.

‘I had better face him, whatever he is,’ she decided, and turned suddenly, when she found herself in the presence of the young man who had attracted her notice the night before. She was angry that he should have thought fit to force himself upon her like this, and her face expressed its most chilling surprise.

'I'm afraid you think me very officious,' he said, 'but it struck me that you might not know that the tide is coming in.'

She was instantly reassured by his manner, which was merely that of a man who had put some pressure on himself to hazard a caution. 'You mean, I ought to turn back?' she said.

'Of course,' he said, 'I don't know how soon you wish to get back, but it is a long way up the cliff and round by the road, and unless you turn at once you won't be able to go back along the shore without having some rather awkward rocks to climb.'

She thanked him and turned. 'But how are you going to manage?' she asked, as he seemed about to pass on.

'Oh,' he said, 'I shall find a path up the cliff somewhere.'

'I couldn't let you do that very well,' she said, 'after you have come all this way to warn me; you would get back late then. And besides,' she added, 'I might find it difficult to get round the Point alone.'

'I shall be very pleased to go back with you if you will allow me.'

She was not at all sure that she ought to have suggested it; but after all, as she told herself, she knew who he was; he had behaved very nicely, and if the tide reached the rocks round the Point before she did she would certainly be glad of some help.

'Then I think you had better come,' she said carelessly.

CHAPTER IV

YOUNG MR. CHADWICK

So he walked on by her side, a privilege which he had certainly not counted upon, but had obtained in a perfectly legitimate way, since the risk, if slight, was real enough. He was a little dazzled, notwithstanding, now that he had seen her; he had expected beauty of the haughty aquiline type—this girl's spirited petulant profile was almost childish in its outline save for the rather ironical curve of the firm mouth and the decision of the perfect chin. There was a frank directness, too, in her manner, a calm unconsciousness which gave her a singular charm; she struck him as a piquant combination of inconsistent qualities.

'Your small French friend soon got tired of his shrimping,' he began, by way of opening a conversation.

Her eyes expanded. 'How did you come to know anything about that?' she inquired.

He decided upon perfect frankness, though he wished now that he had chosen any other topic. 'I happened to be close by when you rescued him from his nurse's clutches,' he said.

His grey eyes had a subdued twinkle in them, with which she vainly tried to feel offended. ‘I can't think what made me do it,’ she said, ‘it must have seemed perfectly absurd.’

‘It was rather a high-handed proceeding, perhaps,’ he admitted, ‘but, if you will let me tell you so, I thought it was very kind of you to take the child's part like that.’

‘To tell you the truth,’ she said, ‘I didn't think about the child at all, it was that woman's insolence which annoyed me so. I could not resist putting her down.’

‘You gave the small boy a happy morning, at all events,’ he said.

‘I have not even that consolation,’ she replied, with a little sardonic grimace. ‘I don't know which of us was more relieved when we parted.’

‘And do you think he'll be better treated in future?’

‘I really don't know. Probably not. I can't say I feel very much interest—it was such a whining little animal!’

For the moment he felt slightly repelled—there was something rather heartless in this indifference of hers.

‘Does that seem strange?’ she added, laughing, ‘after interfering as I did. But I didn't know then that he would look upon me as a kind of ogress, and be longing to get back to his tyrant all the time. I shall not rescue any more little boys. Don't let us talk about him any more. Do you know whether the races will be worth seeing this afternoon?'

'I really have no idea. Why? Are you going?'

'I dare say several people at the Californie will go,' said Margot, 'and I believe we shall make up a party.' She would not betray that she knew who he was, and he evidently was not aware as yet of the proposed expedition.

'The Californie,' he said, 'that is my hotel.' Miss Chevening was grateful to him for sparing her any *phrases de coiffeur* on this coincidence. 'I arrived alone last night. I had a friend, but he got out at one of the stations, after a delay of twenty minutes, to know how much longer the train was going to stop, and while he was busy making inquiry at the buffet, the train satisfied his curiosity by going on without him.'

Margot laughed. 'And is he there still?' she inquired.

'Oh no, he came on by a later train without any further mishaps, rather to my surprise, for he does not speak with tongues very fluently, and I quite expected to hear of him turning up at Paris or Lyons or Marseilles, or somewhere.'

It struck Margot that there was a certain repressed contempt in his manner of speaking of this friend.

'You were travelling companions till then, I suppose,' she said; 'was it pleasant?'

'Pleasant? oh well, yes, I suppose so—as pleasant as could be expected,' he said rather dryly.

‘You don’t care much for the Continent?’

‘Oh yes, I do, only in this case—well, I’m glad it is over, it was rather collar-work, and I did not quite know what I was letting myself in for when I agreed to go with him. But I’ve no right to bore you with all this.’

He was not boring her by any means; she liked his cool manner, and the very tones of his voice were pleasant to her ear; there was no effort or affectation about him; he did not pose or fall into the ordinary young man’s mistake of trying to be brilliant, but he gave her the impression of a cultivated and rather fastidious nature, whose friendship once gained could be depended upon. The more she saw of him, the greater grew her wonder that he could have sprung from such a parentage.

And so, before the walk was over, they were talking gaily and intimately, more like old friends than a couple whose acquaintanceship had been made in a highly irregular manner during the last twenty minutes.

‘Here we are at the sea-wall,’ he said at last; ‘and I hope you won’t accuse me of being an alarmist—another five minutes, and we should certainly have had to climb for it.’

‘As it is, we have not even got our feet wet,’ said Margot; ‘I almost wish we had had a little more excitement. But for one thing I am deeply grateful—that the tide didn’t come up while I was with that little French boy and his nurse—I should have felt so very foolish.’

Privately he thought this a rather egotistic view of the consequences. 'Yes,' she continued, 'I can fancy how that nurse would have played Job's comforter, and how that little boy would have let himself drown on purpose. I do hate being humiliated!'

'I suppose,' he said, 'we none of us exactly revel in it.'

'I detest it more than most people,' she declared. 'I would do almost anything rather than have to confess myself in the wrong.'

He laughed. 'That is a very amiable trait in you,' he observed.

'I suppose I am not amiable,' she remarked calmly, 'so perhaps it is better to warn you at once.'

'I should be more alarmed, I dare say, if I had any prospect of finding out how far the warning was justified,' he said lightly; 'but I scarcely think I shall have an opportunity of discovering even that in the time I am here.'

Amiable or not, he was thinking, it would be difficult for her to do or say anything which would quite destroy her charm; very probably she was right in what she said of herself; in fact, he had already arrived at very much the same conclusion from what he had seen and heard. Wilful and ungracious and even heartless she might be, but that would not prevent the recollection of the past half hour from stirring him strangely whenever it rose to his mind.

'We are close to the Californie now,' he said abruptly, 'so I will say good-bye.'

'Evidently he has no idea how soon we shall meet again,' she reflected, with a little amusement, as she left him, and she looked forward to enjoying his surprise when he learnt that he might spend that afternoon, and probably several more, in her society, if he cared to do so. That he would so care, she felt assured; that she would be well-content was a point she was equally clear upon. And so she came into her mother's room in the highest good-humour.

'You don't mean to say you have been out in this hot sun all these hours?' said Mrs. Chevening; you will ruin your complexion, Margot, and your hands too!'

'You know I never freckle,' said Margot, 'and as for my hands—look!'

'Well,' said Mrs. Chevening, not being able to discover any fault in the pretty fair hands her daughter extended, palms downward, in self defence, 'but you ought not to be wandering about the town alone all the morning.'

'I was on the shore among the rocks, and I had what ought to have been a romantic adventure—some one came after me and told me it was dangerous to go on and I ought to turn back, so he walked all the way back with me.'

'I thought you had at least some sense of propriety!' said Mrs. Chevening angrily; 'how can you *do* such things, Margot? What was he—who was he—how did you come to allow it?'

'I thought if the tide was really likely to cut me off, it would be as well to have somebody with me,' said Margot, 'so I made him turn back too.'

'You made him? a stranger! Do you know what you are saying?'

'He wasn't exactly a stranger—at least, I knew him by sight; he's staying at the hotel. He is Mr. Chadwick's son.'

Mrs. Chevening's face, which had been a picture of progressive horror, suddenly cleared as Margot made this last announcement. 'You quite frightened me, darling,' she said; 'I was afraid it was somebody I knew nothing about. Still, I wish you would not have these adventures—you really must stay quietly with me in future. Tell me about this young Mr. Chadwick—was he pleasant, Margot?'

'He is a gentleman, at all events,' said Margot; but her mother divined at once that he had made a favourable impression.

'Well, you had better put on your things now,' she said. 'Did I tell you we don't lunch at *table d'hôte* to-day. Mr. Chadwick thought it would be pleasanter if all lunched together a little later. That pretty surah we frock of yours will do nicely, dear.'

'How fortunately things have turned out!' reflected Mrs. Chevening when alone; 'and she is looking her very best to-day!'

Margot took some little pains over her toilette, so that it was slightly after the appointed time that she came into the hall and was conducted by one of the waiters into a large room opening into the *salle à manger* to a table which had been laid for four by one of the windows, where Mr. Chadwick and her mother were already seated.

'Well, young lady,' said her host, in his usual exuberant manner, 'I hope you've not brought a young lady's appetite after your adventure. Your mother's been telling me all about it. So my young rascal has saved you from a watery grave, eh? That's enough to make him a public benefactor.'

'It was very kind of him to warn me about turning back,' said Margot, 'but I don't know that it was quite a question of a watery grave.'

'That's the way we look at the thing now it's over, is it?' said Mr. Chadwick, with a resentment which showed itself through his boisterous geniality; 'I dare say by to-morrow you'll have quietly dropped him out of the affair altogether. Now,'—he was looking at the wine list,—'the first thing is—what will you ladies like to drink? I dare say you won't say no to some champagne. Garçon, a bottle of that; and look here, just see if my son's lost his way, and tell him we're in here, will you? Oh, here he comes at last. Nice manners, young fellow, nice manners—keeping ladies waiting like this!'

Margot was sitting with her back to the big folding doors which a waiter had just obsequiously thrown open, and she kept her eyes upon her plate. She was wondering how the son would carry off the situation; he had seemed easy and self-possessed enough, but was he able to keep his father in subjection without a painful amount of friction?—yes, she had confidence in him, that luncheon would be tolerable now he was come.

The waiter drew back the chair next to hers with the usual flourish, and not until it was taken did Margot raise her eyes to welcome her neighbour.

As she did so, all her anticipations crumbled into dust—the young man who sat at her side was an absolute stranger.

That was bad enough, but it was not the worst; even the hasty glance she took revealed a person whom the most charitable would hardly describe by the title 'gentleman.' Insignificant-looking, with a white face, hair parted in a plume, mouth open loosely from very evident embarrassment, a blunt common nose like his father's, Allen Chadwick seemed to her in that first shock of utterly unexpected disappointment, the most odious person she had ever been brought in contact with.

The author, whose duty it is to see and describe from a less prejudiced point of view than Miss Chevening was capable of assuming just then, hastens to add that this face was redeemed to some extent by a pair of eyes which were deep and honest, with that pathetic look in them of a dog that only asks to be tolerated.

'Mrs. Chevening,' said his father, who evidently was perfectly satisfied with his son's appearance, 'this is my boy, Allen.'

Mrs. Chevening bowed graciously, whereupon Allen rose, knocking over his chair, and came awkwardly round to her, holding out his hand.

She was startled for a moment, but regained presence of mind to shake the proffered hand, and say, 'Oh, how do you do? You must let me thank you for your gallantry to my heedless girl this morning.'

'Eh?' said the unfortunate Allen. 'What girl?'

Margot bit her under lip. 'Mother,' she said in a low voice, 'I—I made a mistake—it was some one else I met and took for Mr. Chadwick!'

'Really, my dear,' said Mrs. Chevening, 'you make mistakes which are extremely annoying for others—pray sit down, Mr. Chadwick, and begin your lunch.'

'So you're not the lucky man after all, Allen?' said his father; 'well, you'll have to make yourself all the more agreeable—see if you can give the young lady a glass of wine and drink to her better acquaintance. Stop, do you know her or don't you? I haven't got *that* straight yet.'

'She—she has the advantage of me at present,' said Allen Chadwick.

Margot compelled herself to touch the hand he extended, and he spilt most of the champagne upon her gloves, which lay by her plate. 'I'm sure I'm very sorry, miss,' he stammered.

Mrs. Chevening was smiling with an expression of suffering. 'Now we must leave Mr. Chadwick to enjoy his sole in peace,' she said; and he set to work in a tentative manner with two forks, which from nervousness he seemed as little at home with as with a pair of chopsticks.

Margot sat like a statue of disdain; she could hardly bear to think yet of all that the reality implied. What had become now of her bright hopes, the pleasant flutter with which she had put on her prettiest frock for that afternoon ?—all for the benefit of this uncouth, underbred boy on her left hand ! And who was the stranger she had rashly accepted as a Chadwick, and treated with the less reserve as one she was certain to know under any circumstances ? How was she to meet him now, and what would he think of her ? She was angry with herself, with her mother, with Mr. Chadwick, and most of all with the unconscious and innocent Allen.

It was a most uncomfortable luncheon party ; a couple of German waiters, one patronising, as if he had paid for it all, the other morose, as if he expected to have to do so, only added to young Chadwick's very evident discomfort. Mrs. Chevening, who was in secret scarcely less mortified than her daughter, did her best to promote conversation, and the giver of the feast alone was easy and unembarrassed. He tried to draw his son out, but the young man confined himself to monosyllables until the champagne loosed his tongue a little.

'What's become of what's-his-name—Orme—by the way ?' asked the father. 'I told 'em to keep a place for him at the regular *déjeuner*—know whether he went in or not ?'

'I don't know," said Allen ; 'I'm not in his confidence. I haven't set eyes on him even to-day.'

'Well, there was lunch all there for him, so he might just as well have eaten it. Remind me to go into accounts with him sometime to-day, and see what

I've got to pay for your tour, young chap. There's no occasion for him to be staying on here—unless you can't do without him.'

'Oh, I can do without him well enough,' Allen blurted out.

'Orme's a travelling companion I engaged for him,' explained his father, 'gentleman-like young chap—college fellow, at the Bar, and all that. But, somehow or other, he and my boy don't seem to have got on together—eh, Allen?'

'I never said so, governor, that I know of; he wasn't my style, that's all.'

'I made up my mind you'd fallen out when he came on alone last night; you'll be more careful how you get out to stretch your legs another time; it was a lucky thing you were able to come on after all.'

Now Margot knew how her mistake had arisen; her acquaintance of that morning must be this Mr. Orme; she could well understand now how far from agreeable his travelling experiences must have been. And he was about to be dismissed like a common courier—he was not thought fit to sit down to luncheon with this polished pair! She would most probably never see him again, and her heart hardened against the person she considered responsible for this sudden termination of all she had been looking forward to, until, by the time the luncheon came to an end, she regarded her unfortunate neighbour with absolute antipathy.

'If you ladies have any finishing touches to put to your toilettes,' said their host gracefully, 'you haven't too much time. I told them to have the fiarker round at two sharp, so you'd better be at the entrance by that.'

Margot's first proceeding was to discard the pretty open-work hat she had been wearing, and put on the plain boating-straw she adopted for everyday use; she could not escape going to Deauville now, or it would seem as if—well, she must go, but she could not resist indulging in this exhibition.

'My dear child!' cried her mother, as she discovered the alteration, 'what possessed you to do such a thing as that? You were looking so nice before!'

'This is quite good enough for the occasion,' said Margot; 'it really isn't safe to speak to me just now, mother; such a *very* little would make me declare I won't go at all.'

Mrs. Chevening looked at her face, and decided not to press the point. 'I am sure you wouldn't put me in such an unpleasant position as that at the very last moment,' she said. 'I could wish myself that young Mr. Chadwick had a little more manner, certainly, but you must have patience with him, dear.'

'I know,' said Margot. 'But what I simply can't understand is why you ever brought yourself to associate with such people at all. Was it worth crossing the Channel to encumber ourselves with two Chadwicks? They're not even decently mannered, they're not amusing, and we shall never get rid of them any more as long as we're here! If you can see any pleasure in such a prospect as that, I certainly can't pretend to follow you!'

‘We shall gain nothing by discussing it now,’ said Mrs. Chevening, a little uncomfortably; ‘the elder Mr. Chadwick is quite well-meaning, and I see nothing so objectionable about him, at all events. I don’t pretend the son is all he might be—but no one, Margot, is without his good qualities, if only one has patience to find them out.’

‘As if I wanted to find any of his!’ cried Margot; ‘but there—I promise to treat him as well as I can, only I do think it is a little hard on me, you know!’

Down below, the two Chadwicks were strolling up and down in front of the hotel.

‘Well,’ said the father, ‘you haven’t sat down to lunch often with a girl like that, I dare say.’

‘No, governor, I don’t know that I have.’

‘And is that all you say, as if such girls as that were as common as coppers! Why, when I was your age I should have found more to say for myself than you did, I can tell you. You must make yourself more agreeable if you’re going to get on with the ladies, young fellow!’

‘Well,’ said Allen, ‘I’ve not been used to ladies of her sort.’

‘I know that; but what you’ve got to do is to *get* used. I give you the opportunity, it’s for you to make the best of it. Lord bless me! a young chap of your age ought not to be afraid of speaking up to a girl; the prettier she is, the more you should lay yourself out to be agreeable.’

‘I shall never do it like you do,’ said Allen.

'You can try at all events. I've my reasons for wanting to see you friends, and girls look for liveliness and conversation; you must make yourself more pleasant, my boy; bless you, it's easy enough.'

Perhaps Allen himself was a little encouraged by his father's confidence, but there was ample reason for misgivings as to his chances of finding any great favour in the eyes of a young lady of Miss Chevening's fastidiousness. A young man of moderate abilities whom a cheap commercial education has just enabled to occupy a clerk's desk in a warehouseman's office, whose home-life has been colourless and mean, and his pleasures such as may be expected when mind and purse are equally ill-furnished, is at some social disadvantage, even when he has good looks and a glib tongue on his side, which Allen could not be said to possess.

From his mother, who had died in his infancy, he inherited a yielding and subservient disposition, which made him accept the monotony and drudgery of his early life without complaint; he lived with his mother's sister, a widow who kept a small shop in a back street, and who, kind as she was in her narrow way, had not been able to make the little parlour behind the shop a very attractive place wherein to pass his evenings. So he had gradually drifted into the amusements and resorts of his class, so far as he could afford them, though he had no actual predisposition to dissipation, and his excesses hitherto had been rare and venial enough, considering the nature of his surroundings. He was not without a feeling for the beautiful, though he had always looked on it from afar, as something in which, by the nature of things, he had and could have no part. Sometimes when he read the second-hand novels which, borrowed from a bookstall a few doors off, formed his only literature, he felt a vague discontent as he faintly realised a world of refinement, a society of beautiful women and accomplished men, but it was too great a stretch for his imagination ever to conceive himself as the hero of these romances; tawdry and fustian as most of them were, they smote him notwithstanding with the sense of his own insignificance.

And the cravings for something higher, some element of romance or passion, to ennoble his sordid existence were always inarticulate, half-unconscious, and would in the course of time have died a natural death, or found satisfaction in some makeshift attachment ending in an imprudent early marriage, disenchantment, and a life-long struggle for bare existence—had not fate intervened in the most unexpected manner.

He knew that he had a father out in India in some capacity; his aunt from time to time received scanty remittances which defrayed his school and maintenance until he was old enough to earn his own living, when they ceased, and he had been informed that his father could do little or nothing for him in the future. Of his grandfather he had never heard, for his aunt cherished a deep resentment on account of the treatment her sister had met with, and so the great change in Allen's life had come upon him with the dazzling surprise of a fairy tale.

He had come back from the office tired and cold one snowy evening in January to supper, and in the little parlour behind the shop he found a stranger, so prosperous and generally splendid in his appearance that Allen hardly believed his ears when he was told that this was the father he had been accustomed to regard as a struggling exile.

The elder Chadwick was a little touched by the son's evident admiration; he felt some compunction for having done so little for him hitherto, his heart warmed with old memories of the dead wife, whose timid, grateful eyes looked at him once more from his son's pale face; from that moment father and son became more united than if they had always lived together instead of meeting then for the first time.

And Allen learnt the wonderful news that, thanks to the tardy repentance of the grandfather, his old life was ended for ever; he was to go and live in luxury and splendour with his father in future, down at the country place in Pineshire, where the old man had ended his lonely days.

At first he had felt strange and bewildered under these new conditions, but he soon became at ease with his father, whom he regarded with ardent gratitude and something very like reverence. In the son's eyes Joshua Chadwick, with his florid manner, his Indian experiences, and rough good-nature, seemed a superior being, by whose confidence and companionship he felt more than honoured. And the elder was satisfied with his son on the whole; the boy was not over bright, perhaps, he reflected, but he would improve, he wanted a little travel to give him a polish; and so, towards the end of the summer, Allen was sent abroad with a young man, whom his father, too much occupied by his affairs to accompany him immediately, had engaged to act as Mentor, until he was able to join him.

Nugent Orme had accepted the post, as the fee offered was a handsome one; he needed funds, and his chance of professional work was not good enough to keep him in chambers for the whole of the Long Vacation.

The engagement had been made by letter, and it was not until everything had been arranged that he had a personal interview with his charge, when he felt a shock of dismay at the task he had undertaken. He had been prepared for some wild young fellow, fresh from a public school or newly rusticated, who would need a firm hand, but with whom he would have something in common, of whom he would have no cause to be constantly ashamed. With Allen Chadwick he found himself from the very first hopelessly out of touch; the young man was awkward, constrained, and, as it seemed, sulkily reserved with his leader. He appeared to have no tastes, no preferences, no interests; he acquiesced when Orme proposed that they should finish their tour by exploring some of the old Norman cities and towns; but the carven glories of Rouen, the stately abbeys of Caen, the cathedral of Beauvais rising in splendid incompleteness high above the clustered red roofs; St. Lo, with its twin grey spires and sleepy old square and streets, and Coutances, enthroned on its poplar covered hill, seemed equally powerless to draw the slightest sign of interest or appreciation from this young Chadwick. Such remarks as he made only confirmed Orme in the contempt he felt for this barren and stunted intelligence.

It cost Orme a positive struggle sometimes to keep his impatience and dislike from appearing too plainly under the constant irritant of such a companion, and involuntarily and without his knowledge something of his feeling showed itself in his manner occasionally. He welcomed the end of his task with a relief which he believed was fully shared by his fellow-traveller, but in this he was entirely mistaken.

Allen Chadwick was secretly dreading the moment of separation; he had been drawn towards Orme from the very first, and had long cherished the hope that before the tour was over the distance between them might be removed. To Allen this young man, only a few years his senior, with the fine clear-cut face and pleasantly incisive voice, the easy bearing and air of unconscious superiority, was a revelation. Orme was his hero, and could have made him happy at any time by a word or smile that spoke of real friendship and sympathy; but he waited for them in vain.

Orme never snubbed him, but, as has been said, he could not always disguise his repugnance, though it never occurred to him that this was perceived; nor would he in any case have given Allen credit for enough sensitiveness to be pained by such a thing. Nevertheless Allen did perceive it, and felt it acutely, although he hid his feelings characteristically under a mask of sullen reserve. He even tried to cherish a bitter resentment against Orme, and think of him as a stuck-up swell who gave himself airs because he had been to college. What was he, after all, but a paid dependent? And then Allen would be as nearly insolent as he dared, which is saying little enough, and would writhe under his senior's utter indifference.

Orme noticed with a contemptuous amusement these feeble attempts at self-assertion : what he never suspected was the heart-ache that underlay them; he looked upon his charge as a hopeless cub in whom there was nothing worth understanding; he did his duty in keeping him out of mischief, and he was conscientiously civil to him—more than that he did not think could be expected from him.

Allen had been very depressed now that the tour was over, and the friendship he coveted further out of reach than ever; but, as he waited with his father before the hotel, Orme's approaching departure was far enough away from his mind. He could think of nothing just then but Miss Chevening, remember nothing but the fact that in a few minutes he was to see her again, that he was actually about to spend the whole afternoon with her. She had awakened all the latent romance in him, so long starved and denied an outlet; he would have given all he was worth to be of some slight service to her, to earn her gratitude in some unformulated manner; he was eager to give her a more favourable impression of himself, and no suspicion of his own grotesqueness in relation to her crossed his mind.

And yet, while he was secretly thrilling with a delicious excitement, he remained to outward observation the same dull, uncouth, and hopelessly uninteresting young man; his father did not guess the reason for his abstracted silence, and Allen was quite incapable of translating into words the impression Margot had made upon him, even if he had not shrunk instinctively from confiding it to anyone.

Presently she appeared with her mother, and he could not find any words to address to her. She seemed, he thought, displeased at something as she stood there; but it only made her look lovelier.

He did not speak even when the *fiacre* started, and they were all four driving, with the usual French accompaniment of whip-cracking, strange cries and jingling bells, down the street, and along the quay, with its row of yellowing limes, cafés, and masts. Margot sat opposite to him, but he could not see her eyes for the sunshade which she had opened, apparently not finding the white canvas awning above the vehicle a sufficient protection; she was very silent, but Allen was content to look at as much of her face as was visible, until his father, who had been carrying on all the conversation with Mrs. Chevening, gave him an admonitory touch with his elbow, intended to remind him of his recent counsels.

Allen turned crimson, but managed, after clearing his throat, to get out, 'We shall have it broiling hot on the course, by all appearances?'

The sunshade was slightly raised, revealing her eyes with a kind of haughty surprise in them. 'Were you speaking to me?' she asked; 'I didn't catch what you said—I beg your pardon.'

'Oh, it's granted, miss, I'm sure,' said poor Allen. It is difficult to understand, perhaps, why this form of accepting an apology—a far more logical and reasonable reply than the conventional 'not at all'—should stamp its utterer as one of the baser sort, but that it has that effect is undeniable. Miss Chevening's pretty eyebrows were raised a little higher, her expressive mouth took a downward curve. 'I was only saying, and I hope I didn't interrupt you, miss,' he went on, 'that it looked like turning out a broiling hot afternoon.'

'Oh,' said Margot, 'yes, it does not promise very well at present.' And the sunshade descended again, this time concealing the whole of her face.

'She's busy thinking over something,' he concluded.

She was thinking, truly enough, and the dainty screen hid a quiver of passionate indignation. 'How can mother expose me to this—how *can* she?' ran the burden of her thoughts.

The afternoon did not promise well indeed.

CHAPTER V

VALENTINE AND ORSON

> She mutter'd 'I have lighted on a fool,
> Raw, yet so stale!'—*Pelleas and Ettarre.*

Over a bridge and the glittering tidal river, past the railway station and its lines of dingy rolling-stock, along a broad thoroughfare, a region chiefly of factories and workshops, the *fiacre* jingled in the stream of vehicles and foot-passengers, till it turned abruptly down a lane and in at a gate, where two nuns stood beseeching alms, and presently, after lurching and pitching over the turf, the carriage drew up along the railings near the winning-post. The variety of costume; the little *gardes municipales* in their green tunics and light-blue trousers; the blouses of the men, the white caps of the women, the tricornes and yellow belts of the gendarmes, the troopers in wide cherry-coloured breeches, the curés in furry broad-brimmed hats, all gave an animation and shifting colour to the crowd, which was as naïvely pleased with itself and the spectacle provided as French crowds generally are on gala occasions. The fashionable and sporting contingent from Deauville was scantily represented, it being the last and least important day of the racing week. Mr. Chadwick's hired fly was one of the few vehicles on the ground. The steeplechase course would not have commanded much respect at Sandown, and the temper of a sentinel who stood guard over the highest hedge was severely tried by the behaviour of a small boy, who leaped it several times in a Remus-like spirit of derision.

'I think I will stay in the carriage,' said Mrs. Chevening, 'but there's really no reason why you should be a prisoner, Margot, dear, if Mr. Allen Chadwick will kindly take charge of you.'

'If you'd like to take a turn, I'll take care of you with pleasure, miss,' said Allen.

Margot had her own reasons for consenting, and as soon as Allen and she were at some distance from the carriage she began: 'Oh, Mr. Chadwick, there is one thing I really must ask of you.'

'You've only to name it,' said Allen, and his heart throbbed. Was he to do her a favour already?

'It's only a trifle, no doubt,' she said, 'but I really cannot let you speak to me as miss.'

'I didn't know you would like to be familiar all at once,' he said.

She shivered. 'You don't quite understand—we are not likely ever to be intimate, but—but we may meet occasionally here, and it is not necessary or usual to use any title or name at all. You may call me Miss Chevening if you like, but not miss—if you do, I shall not answer. Do you think you can remember that?'

'Yes, Miss Chevening,' he said; 'I'm sure I'm only anxious to do the correct thing, but you see, Miss—Miss Chevening, it's like this, I——'

'Oh, please—not any explanations!' she said hastily, 'I quite understand—and now, tell me, does your father mean to stay here any time?'

'I promise you *I* shan't do anything to hurry him,' said Allen; 'this is a regular jolly place, little as I've seen of it, always something going on—it's like Yarmouth for that. There's nothing to do in all those old Cathedral places Orme would potter about in, and precious little to see.'

'Your friend Mr. Orme seems to have rather different tastes from yours?' observed Margot.

'He's no friend of mine,' said Allen awkwardly; 'I can do without his friendship well enough.'

'Is Mr. Orme the sort of person you can't bring yourself to associate with, then?' said Margot. 'Poor Mr. Orme!'

'It's him that holds off—not me,' said Allen; 'not that he hurts me by it. I'm off his hands now, anyhow, and that's a blessing for both parties!'

'And has this Mr. Orme left Trouville, then?' asked Margot carelessly.

'He's got to settle up with the guv'nor first—he'll go as soon as he can—to-morrow most likely. He doesn't want more of me than he can help!' said Allen, with a forced laugh.

'Perhaps,' said Margot, 'you have not taken any pains to be pleasant to him.' ('I won't have Mr. Orme driven out of Trouville by this boor, if I can prevent it,' she was thinking. 'I wonder if I *could* prevent it.')

'Much he cared whether I was pleasant or not!' said Allen; 'but there, Miss Chevening, don't let's talk about him. I've given up minding all that now—here are the horses coming out.'

Margot could say nothing more, and she detested him more cordially than ever at that moment; she was in a mood to hate everything just then, in her chagrin at the cruel trick that had been played upon her; and having nobody to blame but herself, she naturally felt disposed to quarrel with everybody else.

The horses came out, a string of weedy long-tailed and long-legged screws, to most of whom the candid statement placed against two or three names on the official race-card, '*origine inconnue*,' seemed equally applicable; but their appearance caused a flutter of excitement in the crowd, and such admiring comments as 'Voilà le propriétaire lui-même qui monte!' 'C'est une belle bête tout de même.' 'Tenez, ça ne sera pas content de trotter, lui!'

It was not a very thrilling event perhaps, this *course au trot monté*, though with any other companion Margot might have found some amusement in the spectacle of some half-dozen French gentlemen of various degrees of corpulence going round and round the track at a hard trot which degenerated into a gallop at intervals; the favourite came in last, and an ill-conditioned dog added to his jockey's humiliation by yelping derisively after his horse's heels. 'Il n'est pas mouillé du tout;

il n'a pas été poussé!' said the bystanders, in charitable excuse for his defeat; 'Fallait se servir de la cravache, vous savez.'

Margot was just about to suggest a return to the carriage when, as she glanced listlessly round, she saw her friend of the beach some yards away. Would he see her? Even if he did, she remembered, he could not well do more than return her bow—at least she would bow to him. But he did not once look round, he stood there alone, and she could not help thinking how handsome and manly he looked, what a contrast he made to this little monstrosity at her side. It was exasperating to know that he was going away in a few hours, while the other, her *bête noire*, would remain. She was powerless; even if they met in the little time that was left, what chance would there be of renewing that pleasant conversation by the sea-shore? She knew very well how it would be, they would not even meet at *table d'hôte*, for she would doubtless be condemned to form one of that quartette of the morning—he would go away without ever having learnt her name.

'You were asking me about Orme just now,' said Allen; 'if you want to know what he's like, that's him over there.'

'Where?' said Margot, with well-acted indifference; and when she did at last succeed in looking in the direction Allen mentioned, she said, 'So *that* is Mr. Orme! Don't you think he looks a little lonely all by himself—oughtn't you to go and speak to him?

'*He's* not lonely,' said Allen; 'he wouldn't thank me for speaking to him, I can tell you!'

'I see,' said Margot, 'it wouldn't do for you to take any notice of a mere tutor, even though nobody here would know anything about it. I dare say you are quite right, but it seems a little curious.'

He flushed. 'It—it isn't *that*,' he said, 'it's Orme that's the one to look down. And I can't go and speak to him while I'm with you.'

Margot's heart was beating a little quicker than usual; she felt desperate. After all, Allen was not likely to see anything unusual in what she was anxious to lead up to.

'If I am the only impediment,' she said lightly, 'that can easily be settled. You can bring him up and introduce him to me if you like.'

'Do you want me to?' asked Allen, hesitating; he clearly did not welcome the suggestion with any enthusiasm.

'I said—if you liked,' repeated Margot, a little impatiently. 'I think,' she added with a slight smile, 'he will appreciate such an attention on your part.'

'He mayn't care about coming—he's a queer sort of chap,' said Allen; 'and—and what ought I to say to him?'

'Don't you really know how such a thing is usually managed, Mr. Chadwick?' exclaimed Margot, feeling angrier with him for emphasising her humiliation in this way. 'Surely you can say that you want to introduce him to a friend of yours; it is not a very complicated operation, I should have imagined.'

'I've never done it before,' confessed Allen humbly 'but I'll go and tell him that.'

'If only,' Miss Chevening meditated, 'if only he doesn't make some terrible mess of it—it will serve me right perhaps, though, if he does!'

Nugent Orme was abandoning himself to the surroundings, listening to the cries of the women who were inviting speculators to take a one-franc ticket in their 'poule,' of the small boys crying 'Demandez le Jockey du Jour!' with a shrill and yet not unmusical intonation, and the chorus from the bookmakers' quarter of 'Un et demi le champ!' 'Égalité le champ!' 'La place d'Emidoff!' and similar sporting technicalities, when he felt his arm touched, and turned to find Allen, with a very red face, standing at his side.

''Ullo!' said Allen clumsily, 'I—I didn't think I should see you here.'

'No reason why you shouldn't, is there?' replied Orme.

'No,' said Allen, 'only I didn't. And I say——'

'Well, what is it?' asked Orme, as he stopped in confusion.

'If you don't mind, I—I want to introduce you to a girl I'm with. It's that one over there.'

Orme's face, which had begun to wear a curious expression, changed as his eyes fell on Miss Chevening's graceful figure, which he recognised at once, though he could not conceive how Allen had managed to make her acquaintance. She was looking idly away just then, and seemed so little aware of either of them that he checked himself in his acceptance of the introduction.

'Did you ask her?' he said, feeling no confidence in his pupil's social proficiency; 'are you sure she wishes it?' He was too proud, much as he wished it himself, to run any risk of appearing to force himself upon her notice, especially with such a sponsor as poor Chadwick.

'It's all right,' said Allen; 'I told her who you were—she said I might do it if I liked.'

Allen brought him up to her, but here he broke down, and could only blurt out, 'This is Orme.'

Margot was quite at her ease as she laughed and said, 'After all, Mr. Chadwick leaves me to introduce myself, Mr. Orme. I am Miss Chevening. Mr. Chadwick thought you might be feeling a little solitary in the crowd, but perhaps you are one of those people who never do feel solitary anywhere?'

'On the contrary,' he said smiling, 'I am deeply grateful to him.' And he put his hand on Allen's shoulder for a moment with a friendliness which made the young man flush with pride and pleasure.

Margot had her wish after all; she had met this Mr. Orme once more, and the afternoon was not quite a failure. Still it was irksome to her to have Allen standing by, listening to every word that was said with what she chose to consider a mean inquisitiveness; in reality, he was only wondering, with a dash of envy, at the alteration in her tone which Orme's presence seemed to have produced.

Orme himself was on his guard; he was cool and cautious by disposition, and he did not intend to allow his head to be turned by the fact that Miss Chevening thought fit to show him a marked graciousness. He could not come to any decided conclusion about her as yet; for all he could tell that curiously fascinating manner of hers—with its abruptness, its candour, its simplicity varied by touches of irony—might be that of a consummate flirt. He was not sure whether in his heart he approved of her, but he felt the charm of her nevertheless. She interested him strangely, more than anyone he had ever met—this slender, imperious girl, with the hazel eyes and the gleam of bronze in her soft hair; but he must resist her, since he was going away next day, and her true character, simple or complex, would always remain a sealed book for him.

'What is the next race?' she said; '*au trot attelé.* I wish I knew which horse was the favourite—it makes it a little more exciting. Mr. Chadwick, I'm sure you know all about racing—which is the favourite?'

Allen had been to Hampton once, and had seen some races at the Alexandra Palace, besides betting with fellow-clerks to a greater extent than he could always afford, so this appeal naturally flattered him. 'That's more than I can tell you just now,' he said; 'but we might go over to the bookmakers, and I could pick up something from them, I daresay. Would you like to be put on to anything for this race? I shall be proud of the job, I assure you.'

'Thank you,' said Margot, 'I don't bet, and I don't care to go amongst those shouting men on the pedestals. I only wanted to know which is the favourite, if you could find out for me.'

Allen was transported by her tone and the smile which she gave him. 'I'll find out somehow,' he said, 'though I'm not much good at their lingo. I may,' he added, with a flourish, 'do something on my own account.'

He went away, highly pleased at his commission, and when he had disappeared in the crowd Margot turned to her companion with a smile.

'I think I can understand now,' she said, 'why you did not find your tour particularly pleasant.'

He had, of course, made no allusion as yet to their previous meeting, and in the altered state of his feeling towards Allen her smile, taken in connection with his willingness to please her, seemed slightly cruel. 'I had no right to imply that,' he said; 'I'm afraid it was a good deal my fault if we did not get on.'

'No, it was not,' she declared; 'how could you do more than tolerate such a creature? I have only had to suffer him for two or three hours, but even that—— You must be feeling very glad you are going so soon. He told me you were leaving to-morrow.'

'I am leaving to-morrow,' he said a little sadly, 'but I am not certain that I am glad.'

She would not have believed it, but he was not thinking so much of her as of his pupil just then. Something had been revealed to him within the last half-hour which gave him a pang of self-reproach; he had begun to doubt whether he had been altogether just towards his late companion, had not been too quick to despise him, too blinded by social prejudices to see such good points as he had. His conscience troubled him a little, and he was generous enough to be pained at the suspicion of having repelled his pupil's timid and awkward advances all this time. It was too late now to make amends, but he reproached himself for having been so blinded by prejudice.

Margot, necessarily in ignorance of all this, was well satisfied that he should be sorry to leave Trouville; of course, although he could not say so in so many words, there could only be one reason why he should regret it.

'I should be only too delighted if *we* were leaving to-morrow,' she said, 'but I suppose I shall be condemned to many more days of the society of Mr. Chadwick and his interesting son. The hotel was not wildly amusing before—but now!' And she broke off with a little grimace of disgust which seemed charming on her brilliant face.

Orme laughed; the Chadwicks did seem a curious pair to be in companionship with her; he was not altogether proof against the flattery implied in this confession of dislike for another. 'I daresay you will find means to avenge yourself,' he said.

'I am not very patient when I'm bored,' she confessed, 'especially by persons of that class. Do you know, Mr. Orme, I must tell you—though you will not consider it a compliment—when we met this morning

I thought *you* were Mr. Chadwick's son. I did; I thought you were going to be here some time, instead of being on your way home.'

'I wish that had been true,' he said; 'the latter part of it, at least.'

'If you had not put that in,' she observed, 'I should not have believed you—nobody *could* wish he were Mr. Allen Chadwick. It is a pity you will see nothing of Trouville,' she added; 'it's rather an amusing little place, and the surrounding country is so pretty.'

'I have been here before, but it is a pity,' he said simply. And just then the course was cleared for a race *au trot attelé*, with light gigs in the American style, which gave another turn to their conversation. But the longer he stood by her side, listening to her half-mocking, half-interested talk, the harder it seemed that in all probability their acquaintance would last but this one short day.

It was not until the race was over that either of them remembered Allen, and it was not Margot who suggested that they had better see what had become of him. They found him, excited but unintelligible, engaged in an altercation with the proprietor of a *nouvelle combinaison* on the *pari mutuel* system. 'I desire mon monnaie—toute la monnaie!' he was repeating; 'j'ai donné sept francs, et vous donnez deux francs et demi seulement. Je n'appelle ça un parry mutual, je dis!' To which the bookmaker merely replied by a shrug of confidential pity to the audience. Vous voyez,' he appealed to them, 'ça—c'est un

Anglais, ça n'est pas dans le mouvement!' Whereupon the crowd, particularly those who had been equally unfortunate, laughed in compassionate superiority.

Margot held aloof. 'If he chooses to make himself ridiculous,' she said, 'don't let us interfere. He will be hooted at presently.'

But Orme went up and drew him quietly away. 'You're no match for a French bookmaker, Chadwick,' he said; 'better give in.'

'But he's done me,' insisted Allen; 'I can prove it. I gave him——'

'And he's stuck to it, whatever it was,' said Orme; 'some bookmakers do. Come away.'

'I'll tell you how it was, Miss,' protested Allen to Margot, 'I mean Miss Chevening. I went up to him——'

'It's quite useless explaining to me,' she said, 'I know nothing about betting, and I don't want to know anything. Hadn't we better go back to the carriage?'

Orme took this as a dismissal, rather to Margot's disappointment. 'Then I shall not see you again?' she said indifferently. 'I hope you will have a pleasant crossing.'

'Thanks,' he said, 'I am a good sailor. Good-bye.'

As soon as Margot was alone with Allen she suddenly changed her manner to him; she was as nearly gracious as she could bring herself to be.

'I thought you said Mr. Orme was glad to go?' she began.

'Why, isn't he?' There was an accent in his voice which encouraged Margot in something she had resolved to attempt. 'Has he been talking about it to you?'

'Do you want him to stay?' she said, looking away as she spoke.

'I—I should like it, if he liked it,' answered Allen, flushing.

'Don't you see,' she said, 'that he can hardly stay on now without an invitation? But I think that, if you were to ask him——'

'Would *you* like me to ask him?' cried Allen.

'I! What is it to do with me?' she said, exasperated at the thought that this boor had blundered on her true motive. 'Will you please understand that whether Mr. Orme goes or stays is perfectly unimportant so far as I am concerned. I thought you had taken a wrong idea into your head about him, and might be glad to have it corrected. I am sorry I said anything about it at all now.'

'I'm sure it was meant kindly on your part, Miss,' said Allen; 'of course I know you spoke out of friendliness to me, and I'm much obliged. I'll try whether Orme can be got to stay. I'll speak to him this very evening.'

'If you do,' said Margot, 'you will have the goodness not to mention my name, or I shall be exceedingly angry. You will recollect that?'

'I'd rather he thought it was all my idea,' he replied; 'and I do take it very kindly of you putting me up to it.'

'Don't say any more about that, please,' said Margot, feeling slightly ashamed of herself; but she was gratified, too, for she had now some cause for believing that she had not seen the last of Mr. Orme yet.

Meanwhile, much of Mr. Chadwick's conversation with Mrs. Chevening as they sat in the carriage by the winning-post had turned upon his son. 'I suppose now,' he had said, 'there's not much difference between my boy and your young lady, as far as years go—he's just of age.'

'Margot is only nineteen,' said Mrs. Chevening. She was much oppressed by the perversity of things in general just then; was it worth while, she wondered, persevering with her scheme any longer? Could she expect her daughter to marry such a completely unpresentable young man? The father was polished by comparison, and yet she would not have suffered him but for her hasty conclusion that his son would most probably be found to have escaped all trace of vulgarity, and be a young Englishman of the ordinary type, well-looking and well-educated. The reality had gone some way to cause her to lose heart; and yet—these Chadwicks were extremely well off: if Margot could bring herself to tolerate him, a load of anxiety would fall from her shoulders. Mrs. Chevening thought of her growing family and increasing expenses; what a help Margot might be to them all—if only she would!

'Nineteen,' said Chadwick, 'and admirers by the dozen already, I daresay? Does she happen to favour anyone in particular, so far as you're aware, that is?'

Mrs. Chevening closed her eyes for a moment: 'I have no reason for supposing so,' she said faintly.

'Difficult to please, perhaps?' suggested Chadwick.

Mrs. Chevening, not finding any immediate answer to this, took refuge in one of those inarticulate murmurs which are so useful in such emergencies.

'Oh, I'm not blaming her, if she is,' he said. 'It's only natural she should know her own value. I've not seen anyone since I've been back in the old country to come near her in looks.'

'I think she is pretty,' Mrs. Chevening admitted complacently, 'people seem to admire her, certainly. But beauty is such a mere accident.'

'It's the kind of accident a good many would like to meet with,' he said. 'Now, my boy—his face will never make his fortune. But for all that, he's a real good fellow, and so you would say if you knew him as well as I do!'

'That I can quite believe.'

'He's not been much used to ladies' society,' said Chadwick, 'but perhaps he's none the worse for that,' he added, as if to counteract any air of apology in his tone.

'At all events, it is a deficiency so easily overcome, isn't it?'

'Well, it's not everybody I'd say so much to, but I don't think it would do him any harm if he saw a little of a nice well-brought-up girl—such as your young lady for instance. I shouldn't have any objection to his going about with her. And it makes it livelier for her, too, having a companion of the opposite sex.'

'I think my daughter is perfectly happy so long as she is with me,' said Mrs. Chevening, with a touch of dignity.

'Oh, no doubt, no doubt. Still, it isn't quite the same thing, is it? And, judging by the time they've been away together, they seem to have hit it off already.'

Mrs. Chevening kept her private doubts to herself, but presently when Allen and Margot returned, the restored animation and good-humour in her face afforded her mother an agreeable surprise; so long as she did not take one of her inveterate dislikes, things were not hopeless.

Soon afterwards the last race—a steeplechase over very mild obstacles—was run without any mishaps occurring to invest it with excitement, and then the drum beat to disperse the crowd, which streamed peacefully homewards, well satisfied with the afternoon's sport, and the fly carried Mr. Chadwick and his party through the long shadows and slanting red sunlight back to the Californie.

Margot's anticipations were justified: they dined apart that evening, after the *table d'hôte*, at which Nugent Orme had taken his place, not without a hope of seeing her again. She was not there, and he felt that it was on the whole better for his peace of mind. He was smoking a cigarette in the dusk in front of the hotel when Allen came out and sat down on the bench by his side.

For some time he was silent, but at length he said, 'I say, I wish we'd got on better together while we were away.'

'We got on pretty well together, didn't we?' said Orme, not knowing quite what to say.

'We were never what you may call thick,' said Allen; 'I know I've not had your education and all that. It's natural you should hold off from me.'

'If I ever did or said anything to make you think that, my dear fellow,' said Orme, 'I can only say I'm heartily sorry. You see, you rather kept me at a distance yourself.'

This view of the case was rather soothing to Allen. 'I wasn't going to force my friendship where it didn't seem wanted,' he said; 'that was why I kept to myself pretty much.'

'Well,' said Orme, with a little sigh, 'we shall know better another time, eh, Chadwick? I'm sorry we didn't learn to understand one another sooner. Where is your father, do you know? I must go into matters with him some time this evening.'

'Father's on the balcony with Mrs. Chevening and the others,' said Allen; 'and—what I wanted to speak about was this, Orme—you're not *obliged* to go to-morrow, are you?'

'I don't think your father expects me to stay on any longer,' said Orme.

'Oh, I spoke to him about that; he said I might ask you, and—and I wish you'd stay.'

Stay—and see more of Miss Chevening; was it prudent? and yet, there was nothing to call him back to his new chambers at present; would he not be ungracious in thrusting back Allen's offer of friendship? They could never, perhaps, be friends in the truest sense of the word, but he might do something to atone for his past superciliousness.

He had been gained by the other's evident desire to win his liking, a desire which he had never suspected till that day. To ask how far the prospect of meeting Miss Chevening contributed to influence him were to consider too curiously, but his change of feeling towards Allen was genuine enough.

'I'll stay with pleasure,' he said warmly; 'it's kind of you to wish it.'

Allen's heart swelled with a great joy; he had scarcely hoped to be met like this, and felt bigger in his own estimation. 'I'm glad you'll stay,' he said; 'I'm glad you don't mind being friends.'

And the two shook hands. It was a singular result to follow the caprice of a self-willed girl, this establishment of a better understanding between two such natures as those of Allen and Orme; but though it brought about the conclusion she wished, she had not designed it, nor would she have been interested by so unimportant a matter.

CHAPTER VI

SO YOUNG AND SO UN-TENDER!

What right *can* you have, God's other works to scorn, despise . . .
revile them
In the gross as mere men broadly—not as *noble* men, forsooth,—
But as Parias of the outer world, forbidden to assoil them
In the hope of living—dying,—near that sweetness of your mouth?
Lady Geraldine's Courtship.

Nugent Orme stayed on at Trouville as Mr. Chadwick's guest, but somehow he did not find as many opportunities as he had hoped for of improving his acquaintance with Miss Chevening. Her mother had shown him especial civility, and had introduced him to many of her friends, the Whipples in particular; his chair was placed next Miss Magnolia's at *table d'hôte*, an arrangement which did not displease that young lady. But he never found his seat near Margot's, and such conversations as he had with her were short and semi-public.

As for Margot, without very well knowing how it was or how to avoid it, she found herself constantly paired off with the obnoxious Allen, who would not see how intensely she disliked his companionship; his shyness was wearing off a little—which made her detest him all the more; she raged in secret, and at last expostulated openly with her mother.

'It is improving him so wonderfully, darling,' was all Mrs. Chevening could find to say.

'It is not improving *me*—it is driving me nearly insane. I simply *cannot* stand him, mother.'

'You wouldn't say so if you knew how it pleases his father—he feels how incomplete his son's training has been, and is so glad for him to be with you.'

'Why should I complete other people's sons, dear? and why do you care whether Mr. Chadwick is pleased or not?'

'It should be enough for you that I do wish it,' answered Mrs. Chevening, with a rather weak assertion of her authority. 'We are not so surrounded by friends, my dear, that we can afford to offend people who are only too willing to show us every kindness. If you had a little more heart, Margot, you would be touched by that poor boy's anxiety to please you, you would indeed!'

'I suppose I haven't any heart, dear, for it only irritates me. And the worst of it is, I can't make him see it; some day I shall speak so plainly that even he will have no excuse for not understanding.'

Mrs. Chevening flushed with unmistakable anger. 'Listen to me, you heedless girl,' she cried, 'I forbid you—I forbid you to say anything insulting to that young man! Think what you please of him, since you are determined to dislike him, but behave decently to him in public you must and shall. It is not a great deal to ask of you, after all the expense I have incurred in coming here—solely on your account. I thought it would be a pleasant change for you—and this is my reward!'

Margot dreaded a burst of tears at this point, and hastened to make a timely capitulation. 'There, mother dear,' she said, 'don't scold me. I'm not really going to be naughty. Why, if you wished it, I'd walk about Trouville with a bear; indeed, a nice brown sleepy bear wouldn't be nearly so—never mind. I'll make the best of the—the other animal, the *bête noire.* But I do think that I ought to be allowed to abuse him when he's not to hear me.'

She looked so charming as she stood there, with a half-humorous protest beneath her suppliant expression, that her mother's displeasure was appeased.

'Ah, Margot,' she said with a sigh, 'if you only knew your own power!'

'That's exactly what they say of wild beasts in a cage, dear. Would you like to put *me* in a cage?'

'You have no right to say such things,' cried Mrs. Chevening, 'when you know I am only anxious for your good—for the good of you all. It is unkind and ungrateful to talk to me about cages.'

Margot stared. 'Why, I meant nothing—what *could* I mean? Evidently this isn't one of my lucky mornings. Come down and sit on the sands somewhere, and you shall see how good I can be.'

On that occasion, as it happened, Miss Chevening was spared from proving the genuineness of her good intentions. Under one of the giant umbrellas they found the Spokers. 'I've been trying to induce Alfred to bathe,' Mrs. Spoker announced, 'but he's afraid of my finding out how badly he swims. He says he has his tub every morning, but *I* believe he stands outside and splashes.'

'Sea-bathing doesn't agree with me,' said Mr. Spoker.

'I think perhaps he is right about that,' remarked his wife impartially, 'because he bathed once when we were at Torquay on our honeymoon, and he was perfectly green all day. I shall always think of him—pale green with a bright crimson nose,' she went on cheerfully; 'yes, you *were* like that, dear. I very nearly packed up and went home at once.'

'Why didn't you tell me? I would have done all the packing for you,' said her husband.

'I thought it was my duty to bear you, whatever colours you turned,' she said; 'and I must say he has never looked quite so like a dying dolphin since. But you are dreadfully odd and peculiar, Alfred, in lots of ways.'

She was proceeding to describe her astonishment on first seeing Alfred scrubbing the top of his head with a nail-brush, when one of the opéra-bouffe-ish *cabanes* came creaking and jolting over the sand and stopped a few paces off.

'There's young Mr. Chadwick,' said Mrs. Chevening. 'Mrs. Spoker, do you know that it's market day? Wouldn't it be pleasant for you and Mr. Spoker, and Margot and——'

'Oh, and there's that nice Mr. Orme, too,' cried

Mrs. Spoker; 'delightful! No, Alfred, I shan't let you come, five's an awkward number; you must stay and amuse Mrs. Chevening, *she* hasn't heard all your stories. Mr. Orme will take care of me.'

Probably Mrs. Spoker had some idea of the truth, and was mischievous enough to thwart any schemes Mrs. Chevening might be entertaining; or else she gathered from Miss Chevening's expression that she would be grateful for a little relief from young Mr. Chadwick's society, and had the good nature to oblige her. At all events the four had not proceeded far before Mrs. Spoker had effected a transfer of partners, and Orme found himself assigned to Margot.

It pleased her to express some surprise at his being still at Trouville. 'I thought you left yesterday or the day before,' she said; 'I haven't seen you anywhere.'

'I'm afraid that was because it did not occur to you to look. I was at *table d'hôte*.'

'Oh, so you were, I remember now—you were sitting by the Whipples. I hope you found them entertaining?'

'Very.'

'Miss Whipple is amusing—when you like that kind of thing. Well, I wish I had been in as pleasant company as you appear to have been. I haven't been amused at all. Mr. Orme, tell me, weren't you induced to stay on here by the prospect of having some more of Mr. Allen Chadwick's society?'

'I stayed on his invitation,' he replied.

'I wish you could manage to enjoy a little more of it, because I seem to have monopolised it at present, and I don't want to be selfish.'

'If I have had less of it than I might have expected that is really not my fault.'

'You mean that it is mine? What I must have been depriving you of! Have you been very inconsolable?'

'I think I ought to tell you,' he said, 'I'm afraid I gave you the impression that I disliked him rather than otherwise. It was true then; but lately I have come to see that I was unjust. I see much now that I would not see before.'

'Ah,' she replied, 'I suppose he is seen to better advantage at a distance—like a mountain; but you see I have had no opportunities of discovering that for myself. I have been so very unfortunately placed. But I am rather curious to know what these newly-discovered beauties in his character really are. Has he suddenly developed a sense of humour, or a glimmering notion of how he ought to behave? Was his twang assumed to try us? Or is he that boringest of all bores—the rough diamond? Do please enlighten me.'

'I don't think it would be of much use if I tried,' he said; 'suppose we change the subject?'

'Suppose we do without a subject,' she retorted, and walked on in majestic silence with her chin very much elevated. Miss Chevening did not take at all kindly to a setting-down. He had been a little repelled again by this exhibition of disdain, he thought her needlessly hard, and yet there was something captivatingly childish in this petulance of hers which made it difficult to take her seriously.

'Is talking strictly prohibited?' he said at last, and she broke into a charming, unwilling smile.

'Was I cross?' she said. 'Yes, I know I was. But you were so very superior, weren't you? Never mind, here we are at the market; let us try to finish our walk without quarrelling.'

Her eyes were kind and frank and friendly again, and for the rest of the morning no one could have been more sweetly engaging, more ready to give pleasure and be pleased, than this most contradictory and variable young lady. Orme wandered by her side through the maze of white-capped old women, with their baskets and stalls heaped with wares of all kinds—butter in leaves, live rabbits in boxes, dogfish in baskets, and cool fresh-smelling country-produce. All the time he had a sense of the delight and privilege of being with her, coupled with a kind of impatience at himself that his enjoyment was not keener and more conscious still; it seemed to him that it was somehow not so delightful now as he felt it would be to look back upon later.

Near the quay a travelling dentist had stationed a gilded vehicle like a diligence, from the *coupé* of which, gorgeously arrayed in a crimson dressing-gown, he was commending the virtues of a toothache tincture, while a young woman on the roof punctuated his more impressive periods with a pair of cymbals. As they came up he was sprinkling his audience with drops of the tincture, by way of an appeal to their senses. 'If it smelt unpleasantly,' he was good enough to explain, 'I should not permit myself to offer it to you.' But Miss Chevening bestowed all her notice upon a small wooden box which was suspended from the splashboard, and which had a pane of glass in front. Through this pane peered a melancholy and cynical little monkey, which had excited her sympathies. The crowd of grinning fisher-lads and wrinkled old peasants made way for her as she moved up to the cage. 'Oh, see, Mr. Orme,' she cried appealingly, 'the poor little thing! Is he a patient, do you think? Do they try the tincture and things on you, dear? No, your teeth are too good.' And, bending down, she began to talk the most charming and caressing nonsense to the captive, while Orme wondered idly whether the monkey was at all consoled by the sight of that exquisite face at his prison wicket. Probably the creature's ideal was something very different; he merely blinked his tired eyes and scratched his ear with a bored suspicion.

The dentist was inviting any sufferer from toothache to step up and obtain relief, whereupon a sheepish and palpable hireling mounted, and was treated with the tincture to the sound of cymbals. 'Vous êtes consolé, n'est ce pas?' the professor inquired majestically, after a dramatic pause for the cure to take effect. 'Mais oui,' said the patient, with a perfunctoriness that suggested consolation in advance. Then, as the dentist showed an alarming disposition to become anatomical (with diagrams), and to produce unpleasant things in bottles out of the boot, Nugent thought it as well to go on, and they strolled along the quay by the fish-stalls, which were laden with immense and hideous flat fish, heaps of little grey shrimps (which a marketing *bonne* would occasionally stir up with the ferule of a depreciatory umbrella), and Prussian-blue lobsters, blindly groping for revenge. And Miss Chevening had remarked the prevalent expression of the fish—a ludicrous goggle-eyed astonishment that they should have been caught at last, taken in by a trick as old as the sea itself.

'I remember feeling quite guilty about catching a fish once,' said Orme. 'I was out deep-sea fishing, and we caught an immense cod. He lay there, gasping and spluttering, in the bows, exactly like a highly respectable and indignant old gentleman in a white waistcoat; he only wanted a gold chain. I really felt inclined to apologise for taking the liberty of hooking him.'

'But you didn't put him back?'

'Well—no; but I avoided his eye. He breathed his last with a calm dignity that completed my remorse.'

'The remorse of the Walrus and the Carpenter,' she said. 'Look, this fish has a striking face—they call it a "St. Pierre" here—one side of his profile is pious and resigned, the other is sneering and malignant. I wonder which he kept for his family.'

All this is trivial enough, and would be scarcely worth recording were it not that it is just such light-hearted foolish talk as this that advances an acquaintanceship many months in a single hour. Orme saw a new Miss Chevening, tender-hearted, full of the sweetest gaiety, simple and natural; a very different person from the scornful, sarcastic young lady of half an hour before. Presently in some way she came to tell him about her family, and the old riverside home at Chiswick.

'Such a queer, shabby, out-of-the-way old house,' she said, 'with only a narrow little path and some old poplars in front, no road, and then the river. But the dearest old place for all that—especially in the summer, when you can sit out on the balcony and see the boats go shooting by, and the people streaming across the bridge to Kew Gardens. Even in the winter, though, when it's all foggy and misty, I like it. I am always glad to get back to it. I hated it when we first went to live there—we all did—but now I wouldn't change it for any place in the world.'

This and more of the same nature he learnt from her during that walk; and all the time he had her quite to himself, for Mrs. Spoker kept Allen at a discreet distance until the return, when she joined them, in raptures with the dentist, to whom she declared she intended to present her husband for scientific purposes.

Orme, as has been said, came away with a deeper and more pleasing impression of Miss Chevening, but he was by no means in love with her even yet; he told himself that she was an interesting study, a comrade who could be delightful when it pleased her. She was certainly lovely, but the type of woman he admired was smaller, fairer, less mutinous, if not meeker, than Margot, with her fine physique, her masses of dusky hair with the gleam of bronze in it, and her vivid, spirited face. There was not the least danger; and besides, had she not, even in the short time he had known her, shown qualities which in his heart he did not admire? He was not in love, that was certain; but he thought of her pretty constantly notwithstanding.

He had more frequent opportunities of observing her now, for, since that walk with her, it had come to be looked upon as a natural thing that he as well as Allen should be in attendance upon Miss Chevening. Her mother, though of course present on these occasions, raised no objection, being either too indolent to engage in any further encounter with her daughter, or doubtful whether she could interfere without offending Chadwick, which she was very anxious to avoid.

But this greater freedom of intercourse brought Orme, on the whole, more of torment than delight, though each day he felt the physical attraction of her more powerfully, and she made no secret of a growing pleasure in his society.

Allen usually made the third person in the party, and it was her treatment of him which almost counteracted her charm in Orme's eyes. Generally she scarcely deigned to notice him at all, but if she did it was invariably in a subdued tone of profoundest contempt; when she had occasion to speak of him in his absence it was with the deepest, the most unsparing disdain.

Some men might have found a delicious flattery in such a contrast; Orme had a somewhat ascetic conscience in these matters, his keen admiration of this girl's beauty made him a sterner critic of her faults, which he absolutely resented. With all her loveliness, he denied her right to adopt that attitude of supreme scornfulness to one so helpless and inoffensive as the unfortunate Allen; every fresh instance of it gave Orme a sharper pain, and the fact that Allen was quite unconscious of all her veiled mockery only made her conduct worse in his friend's eyes. Why, he wondered, should she, who looked all that was sweet and lovable, show this ugly side to her nature? As it would be worse than useless to protest, he would at least do nothing that would imply acquiescence—he would prevent this young Chadwick from being made publicly ridiculous.

And, perhaps with a view to his own protection from a greater danger, he contrived expeditions for Allen and himself to various places along the coast and inland which kept them away from the rest of the party for the greater part of each day.

At last this precaution defeated itself. He and Allen had taken the train to Pont l'Évêque, and were walking back to Trouville by way of Bonneville, the fine old Norman stronghold where Duke William extended a dubious hospitality to Saxon Harold, and Matilda beguiled her solitude by needlework, and Berengaria mourned for Cœur de Lion. The massive keep and the old walls with crumbling towers at the angles are all that remain of the castle now, though a whitewashed green-shuttered building has grown in amongst the ruins like a parasite. Outside the entrance they saw a large white-awninged break and pair, and in the courtyard—which is now neatly laid out with gravel walks and turf, blazing flower-beds and fruit-trees—a party of tourists had just preceded them.

‘Oh, yes,’ Orme heard a familiar voice remarking, ‘I know very well it’s all perfectly sweet and too majestic for anything, but I don’t seem as if I *could* have my imagination excited by any more old relics. I’ve been round peopling so many antiquated piles with knights and pages and châtelaines and troubadours that I don’t feel to have any left for a number-two ruin like this. I can’t re-create the dead past worth a red cent to-day. Oh, Mr. Orme, now this is what I call a delightful meeting! I hope you feel it delightful as well? Yes, we’re all here, the others are going round. M. de Pommesuçant, we’d better go round too, if you’ve no objection.’

‘It was Mr. Chadwick’s idea—our coming here in a party,’ explained Miss Whipple to Orme as they walked on; ‘he managed it all—he’s perfectly splendid at managing. I do admire him for one thing, anyway,’ she added in a tone of impartial laudation: ‘he’s a live man all the time, there are no flies on him.’

Orme could see the rest of the party on ahead—Chadwick, the Spokers, the Whipples, and Mrs. Chevening, and, with a thrill he could not prevent, he saw a slim tall figure which could only belong to Miss Chevening. ‘I say,’ Mr. Spoker was observing, as they all stood round a kind of deep cellar, ‘this is interesting—*isn’t* it interesting, now? The guide says this is the identical *oubliette* in which De Chaumont was imprisoned by Richard I.; how it carries you back to the old times, eh? See, there's a lamp burning down there.'

'Before you're quite carried back, dear,' said his affectionate wife, 'perhaps you'll tell us who De Chaumont was, and what he did. Ah, I *knew* he didn't know!' she cried, 'he was so very enthusiastic.'

'I know quite enough to make it interesting to me, my love, whatever it may be to you,' he retorted. 'Here's a curious thing, now, we are coming to the very chapel in which Harold took the solemn oath to help William to acquire the throne of England.'

'Why,' remarked Miss Whipple, 'there isn't room to take so much as an affidavit in there!—no wonder he broke it. Let's come away, this is disenchanting.'

'Mees Chevenain,' the young Frenchman, an enthusiastic Anglomaniac, was saying to Margot, 'will you make with me the ascension of the tower? and upon the top we will 'ave a beautiful blow on the eye.'

Margot was in rather a reckless mood just then; for some time she had noticed Orme's defection, and resented it deeply. She had found him agreeable and interesting, she had respected him and been anxious to have his good opinion. Now, it seemed, he preferred the company of that ill-bred idiot to hers. Of course she affected to treat the whole matter with indifference, but her heart was very bitter against both Allen and his friend, and she was childishly ready to seek some means of retaliation.

She had chosen not to see the newcomers, and, by way of avoiding them, went up the worn stone steps with M. de Pommesuçant, and stood on the little platform looking down on the moat, whose velvet-ridged sides were flecked with shade from the gnarled old apple-trees that grew along the bank. Beyond, across the tree tops, lay the shimmering plain, with the roofs of Touques glittering in the afternoon sun, and, further still, the deep lapis lazuli blue of the sea. Inland stretched a rich country landscape, a patch-work of deep chocolate, tender green, and the brilliant yellow of the colza, intersected by long double lines of poplars, and backed by distant ultramarine hills. The *battoirs* of the washerwomen, as they knelt over a soapy little roofed tank below, made a cheerful hammering.

'You find it magnificent?' her companion asked.

'The view?' she said absently—she had hardly noticed it—'oh yes.'

'And I,' he agreed. 'To some, nature is *triste* and wants of gaiety. For me, no. I am like you others—you English. I love the repose, the picturesque; I come to Trouville, not to live as in Paris, but for change, for simplicity. I am very fond of all your English ways of living: your fox-hunt, your dogscart, your novel—ah, how I adore your "Vicaire of Wackfiel" and your "Clarisse Arlow"!—your 'ome, and your games of the family. There is a game I have often heard but seen nevare, it is called, I think, "Kiss at a Ring;" could you inform me how to play him?'

'I am afraid not,' said Margot; 'but there is some one below who I daresay could tell you all about it; we will go down and I will ask him.'

In the courtyard she saw Allen and Orme, with all of the party except her mother and Mr. Chadwick, who were watching the custodian as he dropped pieces of lighted newspaper down the castle well.

'Mr. Chadwick,' said Margot sweetly to Allen, in her clear soft tones, 'M. de Pommesuçant is very anxious to know how "Kiss in the Ring" is played. I suppose you have played it often enough on Bank Holidays, and are quite an authority; would you mind explaining it to him?'

'It's simple enough,' said the unsuspecting Allen, 'we might have a game here, if you didn't mind.'

'Thanks,' she said, 'we should mind very much. You see, M. de Pommesuçant, English ladies are not in the habit of playing "Kiss in the Ring."'

'Then it is only for the English gentilmans?' said the mystified Frenchman.

Miss Chevening laughed. 'I must leave Mr. Chadwick to answer that; *he* plays it at all events. Where do you play it, Mr. Chadwick?—at tea-gardens and places of that sort? Please instruct M. de Pommesuçant.'

'A thousand thanks,' said the latter gentleman gallantly, 'but I do not wish to learn a game I cannot play with the English ladies.'

'Perhaps you are right,' said Margot; 'it is not at all an aristocratic amusement, in spite of Mr. Chadwick's fondness for it.'

She had the gratification of knowing that Nugent Orme was standing close by, and she could see from his expression that he was intensely angry. She did not care: anything was better than that he should seem so provokingly unconscious of her existence.

The rest of the party had gone on in search of further objects of interest or points of view, and she was preparing to follow when she was stopped by Orme.

'Don't go yet, Miss Chevening,' he said. 'I want to speak to you.'

There was an air of authority in his tone that mastered her. 'You must find me a seat, then,' she said.

There were some under the fruit-trees, and she sat down. 'Do you prefer standing?' she said, as he stood moodily by.

'Yes, I do,' he said shortly. 'Miss Chevening,' he broke out a moment after, 'why, in Heaven's name, can't you leave that poor young Chadwick in peace?'

She was provokingly innocent and surprised. 'What did I do? I merely assumed he had played a vulgar game, and as it turned out I was quite right.'

'You did it to humiliate him and make him openly ridiculous,' he said.

'He noticed nothing.'

'Such an excuse as that is worse than none. I thought, if I kept him out of your way as much as possible, you would have some consideration for him when you did meet.'

She sat there restlessly spreading and shutting her hand. ‘I can’t help it,’ she said rebelliously; ‘I do not see why I should have to meet such a person at all, and when I do—— But you would never understand how I feel about it. I can’t be civil to him; the mere sight of him——’

‘I don’t understand,’ he replied; ‘I hope I never shall. Whatever you are and whatever he may be, you have no right to treat him with a contempt like this. It is insolent, wicked; you ought not to encourage it, for your own sake, Miss Chevening. If you despise him so intensely, that should be a reason for letting him alone.’

She coloured; she knew, if he did not, what her real motives had been in making that gratuitous attack on his *protégé*; apparently she had succeeded only too well.

‘You are a very warm partisan,’ she said maliciously; ‘don’t they say that the latest converts are always keenest to make proselytes? Wasn’t your own conversion rather recent, Mr. Orme?’

‘At least,’ he retorted angrily, ‘I can’t charge myself with having been carried away by prejudice.’

‘As I am? I don’t admit that it is prejudice; I call it instinct, Mr. Orme, the instinct given to us for our protection against noxious creatures of all kinds. But whatever it is,’ she added wilfully, ‘I have it and I must obey it, whether it displeases you or not. So I’m afraid your lecture has not done very much good to anybody.’

‘Evidently,’ he answered.

He felt irritated and depressed; he had only made matters worse by speaking, and even now, angry as he was with her, he was gallingly conscious that that air of impertinent mockery made her more bewitching than ever.

'Have you quite finished your remarks?' she inquired, 'because, if so, I think I will go and see what the others are doing over there. Don't let me disturb you.'

He watched her go lightly across the turf without attempting to follow her; she was singing gaily to herself as she went. She had no heart, he thought; she was as irresponsible in her careless cruelty as a child.

In justice to Margot, however, it should be mentioned that she had had some additional reasons of late for emphasising her dislike of Allen. She more than suspected that her mother was secretly encouraging the idea of an engagement between them; she had more than once been certain that she had heard her name and his coupled together in conversation by Chadwick, with whom her mother seemed now so completely in accord. Nothing should make her yield to anything so horrible and preposterous; of that she was serenely confident; but in the meantime she would leave as little room for misunderstanding as possible. She was not very angry with Nugent. The difference between them had formed rather a pleasing excitement; he had looked particularly well when roused; she looked forward to several repetitions of the scene. It was highly absurd and presumptuous of him to take sides against her and find fault with her, but it was better than if she had been unimportant in his eyes. If she chose, she thought, she could soon make him change his opinions;

it was impossible that he could really place Allen before her.

Orme was considering how soon he could bring his stay to a close without discourtesy to Chadwick, when Mrs. Chevening relieved him from all perplexity on that point. She came to him under the trees, smiling at him as she advanced with her most laboured insincerity.

‘So sorry, dear Mr. Orme,’ she began, ‘to hear we are to lose you so soon! Mr. Chadwick tells me you are leaving to-morrow. I didn’t know you were only staying here a week.’

In any case, unless his desire to stay had overcome all self-respect, he could not have ignored so very plain a *congé*, seeing that she had evidently been deputed to this delicate mission. As it was, he was glad of his release.

‘Yes, I must leave here to-morrow,’ he said; ‘I have stayed too long already.’

‘Not too long for us, not nearly long enough,’ she replied graciously; ‘but of course there is your profession—the Bar, is it not? and to succeed in that you must work so very hard. I can quite understand that you don’t feel justified in taking a longer holiday—quite—quite, Mr. Orme.’

‘Where are Mr. Allen Chadwick and Mr. Orme?’ asked Miss Whipple a little later.

‘They’ve walked on,’ said Mrs. Chevening; ‘Mr. Orme wouldn’t take a seat in the break; so foolish of him, when he will want to get back early; he has all his packing to do.’

‘Why, is Mr. Orme going away?’

‘Oh, I thought you knew! he was just telling me all about it, how he couldn’t stay a day over to-morrow—a week was all he intended to stay; it seems such a very arduous profession, the Bar.’

There were comments of various kinds, though none unfavourable upon Orme, and some expressions of sorrow at his departure, but Miss Chevening did not join in them. It is possible that she had not heard that he was leaving, for she was much interested in ascertaining the precise depth of the castle well at that time.

CHAPTER VII

A REACTION

From which I escaped heart-free, with the least little touch of spleen.
Maud.

THAT evening Orme, having finished his packing, such as it was, had come down and gone out upon the terrace overlooking the sands. It was deserted just then; empty coffee-cups and liqueur glasses stood on the little round tables, the visitors had adjourned to the Casino or their private rooms—he had the place to himself. He leaned upon the balcony rail and looked out to sea, on which darkness was rapidly closing, the long bars of orange and citron which broke the slate-coloured cloud-banks in the west were narrowing and fading, and over the dim sands below, the light from the hotel lamps flickered fantastically as the breeze blew the tricoloured banners with which they were festooned across their globes, and, farther out, the waves broke in gleaming phosphorescent rolls. Far away to the right, two bright revolving lights and a chain of fiery points indicated Havre, where he would be next day; on the left were the crimson and green lights of the piers and the garish electric halo above the Casino.

He was thinking, a little sorely, about Miss

Chevening. He had not spoken to her since their conversation in the courtyard at Bonneville. He had seen her at the *table d'hôte*—at a distance as usual—and that would in all probability prove to have been his last sight of her. Perhaps, as he was bringing himself to see, it was best so. There had been peril in his friendship: he had come dangerously near losing his heart to her. He had admired her unwillingly, against his better judgment, unable altogether to resist the charm of her *insouciance*, her graceful disdain, her pretty impertinences, even when most distrustful of the nature they seemed to reveal.

But this last experience had cured him, disenchanted him, he thought. This girl was more than careless—she was cruel, merciless to everyone that did not fall in with her fastidious taste; remonstrances, appeals were thrown away upon her. Heaven help the man who let himself love such a woman as that! Well, he had had his warning; he should go away next morning without a pang or a regret—except that disenchantment is perhaps fraught with the keenest regret of all. While he was indulging in these meditations, he heard the swing-doors move behind him and the sweep of drapery, and then his name called by Miss Chevening herself. He turned, to find her standing close by, her eyes shining and her face looking pale in the subdued light.

'You have something to say to me?' he asked, wondering greatly.

'I wanted to ask you first, if it is true that you are going away to-morrow.'

‘Quite true. It was understood that I could only be here a week.’

‘I did not know. If I had, I should not have spoken as I did this afternoon to you.’

‘I really don’t remember,’ he said, ‘that I had any reason to complain personally of what you said.’

‘Ah!’ she said, ‘don’t put me off by being cold and civil, please, Mr. Orme; I couldn’t bear to think that our last talk should be like that. I don’t want you to go away thinking very badly of me—and—and I am afraid you will!’

She spoke with such a sweet humility, such childish eagerness to put herself right with him, that no man could have hardened his heart against her, and no one but a coxcomb have misinterpreted her appeal.

‘It is too good of you to care what I think,’ Orme said.

‘Of course I care! Haven’t we been friends? Considering how short a time we have known one another, we were very good friends, I think—till lately. And though I don’t suppose we are very likely to meet again, I should like to part friends. I don’t want to have it all spoilt at the last.’

She was more dangerous just then than he had ever found her before. He had to keep a firm command over himself to restrain some speech which would be a hideous mistake.

‘I know,’ she went on, ‘it was I who spoilt it, but—but I think you are a little too severe. You don’t consider enough what it is to me to have to know a creature like that; it's so different for a man—it is really! And it acts on my nerves, it makes me—well, not myself. I am not bad except to people I thoroughly dislike. This afternoon, I own, I had no excuse—it was mean of me, but seeing him there suddenly—it annoyed me; I wanted to make him feel a little, but he felt nothing—it was I who felt ashamed! And that made me speak to you as I did. You know how I hate owning myself in the wrong, but I will this once—just a little bit.'

Orme could not help being amused as well as touched. Miss Chevening's penitence was so evidently of a limited order.

'That is something, isn't it?' he said, smiling.

'There is another thing,' continued Miss Chevening hurriedly. 'Perhaps, as you seem to take such an interest in him, you may be feeling a little uncomfortable about leaving him to my tender mercies? You need not be. I hope we shall not have to be here very much longer, but, while we are, I will be as good to him as I can possibly be expected to be. There!'

'I am sure you will not regret it.'

'Are you? I am not—but never mind. And you *do* believe a little more in me than you did, don't you?'

What could he do but protest? And just then, too, his belief in her was clouded by no mistrust. It was impossible to look at her as she stood there and think a harsh thought of her.

'Then—that is all, and—mother is waiting for me in the *salon*; I must go in now, Mr. Orme. We may not meet again before you go to-morrow, so will you shake hands—just to show we are friends again?'

'I am only too glad that you will let me be your friend—now and always,' he said, as he held her hand for an instant; and then she went within, leaving him less reconciled to his approaching departure than she had found him, and yet with a consolatory glow at his heart. He would go away now with a memory of her marred by no touch of bitterness; it was an episode in his life, and it was finished, but it would be long before he forgot it, and as often as he recalled it, it would always be with the same tantalising wonder whether he had just escaped delicious happiness or exquisite misery.

. . . . . .

The next morning Miss Chevening, who had been one of the party who saw Nugent Orme off, stood by the lighthouse, following the steamer as it crossed the bay to Havre, until it became indistinguishable against the blurred smoke and sparkle of the quays. She felt a little sad; she had not realised till then how much he had filled her life of late; how interesting it had been, even to differ from him. It gave her a momentary pang to look at the Roches Noires and remember that walk with him the first day. Trouville looked different, somehow, now he had gone—it seemed to have lost its meaning.

'He went away very sudden at the last,' said Allen, coming up to her. 'I'm sorry he had to go like that; aren't you, Miss Chevening?'

Miss Chevening made a diplomatic reply to the effect that there was always something rather melancholy in seeing people off, even if they were almost strangers.

'Why, you couldn't call him a stranger!' cried Allen; 'you knew him—well, pretty near as well as you do us. You won't have to see *us* off just yet,' he added consolingly.

'It is just possible,' remarked Margot, 'that—to spare ourselves all avoidable pain—we may go first.'

'Or—I say—we might all go together, eh?' he suggested eagerly.

'We might, of course, but I don't see the slightest reason for such an arrangement.'

This could not be called exactly cordial, but it was an effort to her to answer him at all, and she was really putting some control upon herself in doing so at that particular time. But for the joint effect of her promise to Orme and the thought of her mother's displeasure, she could not have endured Allen as patiently as she did during the following days.

Margot's regret for Orme was but a passing one; she was heartwhole still, and rather annoyed with herself for indulging even a momentary sentiment. He was only a friend, she did not want him as anything else; she would probably not see him again, and she did not feel particularly unhappy at the thought. Still, she liked thinking of him.

Meanwhile, the Trouville season was drawing to a close; the shrill chorus of laughter and squeaking from the oilskin-capped bathers grew less loud and sustained; it was comparatively easy to get a chair, and even a striped umbrella, on the sands; the company became more *bourgeois*, there were fewer yachtsmen in spotless white Carlist caps, and more stout gentlemen in black alpaca leading very small dogs adorned with immense rosettes. In the hotels the *tables d'hôte* contracted as fast as the famous *peau de chagrin*, and the survivors made gloomy jests on their reduced numbers; strips of bedside carpet were protruded, like bilious tongues, from the upper windows, and in the toy villas along the *plage* all the crimson blinds were drawn, and the Swiss verandahs deserted.

As a further sign, Margot and her mother, driving out one afternoon with the two Chadwicks, met the head-waiter of the Californie and his two principal assistants all mounted on spirited horses, with which they seemed none of them to be on the closest terms.

'Why, that's the fellow who brings me my wine,' cried Chadwick; 'he'll be grassed if he doesn't look out, to a dead certainty.'

'None of them can ride a little bit,' said Allen; 'regular muffs—look, that one has lost his stirrup!'

'You talk as if you knew something about it,' said Margot suavely; 'do you ride?'

Her benevolent intention of putting him out of countenance failed for once.

'Oh, yes,' he said, 'I'm very fond of it. I ride every day at home.'

This statement, while it surprised her, certainly raised him a little in her estimation; she had a great respect for manliness, and had not expected him to possess such an accomplishment as horsemanship. It was lucky for him that she did not know the exact extent and duration of that possession, which might have altered the case.

As it was, she treated him with so much more consideration, that that evening, on returning from their drive, after Chadwick had rallied the equestrian waiters on their riding until he was satisfied he had thoroughly endeared himself to them, and Margot and her mother had reached their rooms, Mrs. Chevening—not very wisely—commended her daughter upon her improved manner towards Allen.

'I am really so pleased to see how nicely you behave to that young Mr. Chadwick now,' she said; 'you've *quite* got over your old objections to him, haven't you, darling Margot?'

'If you ask me, dear,' said Margot calmly, 'I think I dislike and detest him more cordially every day, only I'm tired of showing it.'

'Now that's so ungracious, to spoil it like that, when I was feeling so happy about it all, too!'

'Happy? But *why* should you be happy about it, mother?' inquired Margot, as she drew the pin out of her hat and turned round suddenly.

'Is it very unnatural that I should like to see my daughter on—on pleasant terms with the son of some one who is becoming almost an intimate friend?'

'You have a stronger reason than that, dear,' she said; 'tell me what it is.'

'You say such odd things at times,' protested Mrs. Chevening; 'what stronger reason could I have?'

'Ah, you forget I am grown-up! I can't help putting things together, and seeing that you are letting yourself build hopes on what may come of this friendship.'

'How dare you——!' Mrs. Chevening was beginning, when her daughter stopped her.

'Now it's no use, mother dear; you know as well as I do that you have been thinking what a good thing it would be if that dreadful young boor were to pay me the honour of proposing to me. Thank goodness, such an idea has never occurred to him—he wouldn't dare to even conceive it!—but if he did, oh if he did, do you suppose I would ever consent for anything in the world—why, mother, I simply couldn't!'

'Well, my dear,' said her mother, after a pause, 'there's no occasion to excite yourself over it. He has not asked you yet, and there will be time enough to do so when he does.'

'He will be a very foolish youth indeed if he ever does; but, so long as you quite understand, the rest is his affair. Luckily, there is very little time left him, for I suppose we shan't stay here much longer? Everybody is going; even the Spooners leave the day after to-morrow. When shall *we* go, dear?'

'When I think proper, my love,' was the unsatisfactory reply.

'It must be expensive, staying here, surely?' said Miss Chevening, pouting.

'That, again, is entirely my affair.'

Miss Chevening shrugged her shoulders as she prepared to leave the room.

'Very well, mother dear, only I warn you I can't go on behaving nicely for ever. I can't guarantee that my patience shall last many days more—he must not try me too far, that is all.'

Mrs. Chevening made no answer; when her daughter was gone she went to the window and threw open the wooden shutters as if she felt the need of air. 'If she would only be sensible!' she mused aloud; 'if she will only see things in the proper light—but I am afraid of her—yes, I am afraid of her spoiling everything!'

Margot was by no means satisfied with this conversation; it was disagreeable, for one thing, to know that their stay at Trouville—of which place she was heartily tired—was still indefinitely prolonged, but she had other reasons for disquietude. She could place but little confidence in her mother, who, indolent and rather shiftless as she was in most things, was capable occasionally of devising, and even following out, a tortuous policy with surprising energy and persistency. And for some time Margot had had an instinctive misgiving that her mother was working to secure Allen Chadwick as a son-in-law, and that she already had his father's assent and co-operation.

This was not in any way alarming to Miss Chevening, who felt a calm reliance in her own power to withstand all arguments, prayers, or pressure; but it made her very indignant that her own mother should know her so little. And then she felt that she herself must have encouraged the delusion lately by her milder demeanour towards this youthful Orson, which was more exasperating than anything else. *That* mistake, at all events, she resolved she would avoid for the future.

So that when, that same evening, she found herself, as was her nightly fate, walking by Allen's side behind their respective parents to the Casino, she was once more in her most rebellious mood. How much longer, she wondered wearily, would this go on? how long before he gave her the chance of refusing him; he had assumed none of the airs of a wooer as yet—the fact being that he stood in far too much awe of her.

'I chaffed those waiter chaps in fine style,' he was saying; 'did you hear me, Miss Chevening, eh?'

'You gave me every opportunity of hearing you,' she replied.

He had passed the head-waiter in the entrance hall, and, in imitation of his father, had been facetious at his expense.

'You don't think he minded what I said, eh? *do* you?' he asked, struck by her tone into sudden misgivings; 'he grinned like blazes.'

'I dare say it afforded him exquisite amusement,' said Margot; 'but if you don't mind, I shall be grateful if you will choose any other time for amusing head-waiters with merry jests of that kind than when you happen to be with me.'

'Why, I only asked him——' he began.

'Will you please be quiet?' said Miss Chevening, with a very dangerous distinctness. 'I am not at all in a good temper this evening. I would rather not be talked to just now, really.' He glanced at her sideways, scarcely believing she was serious, but the glimpse he had of her drawn eyebrows and the ominous compression of her lower lip gave him, though he was not wise, temporary wisdom to follow her advice until they reached the Casino.

Arrived there, Mrs. Chevening, after establishing herself with Chadwick on the promenade, playfully suggested that Allen must be pining to lose some money at the Race Game, and that dear Margot was always so amused looking on; she thought perhaps if they would promise not to be very long away, they *might*—And they went in to the Petits Chevaux, Margot calculating that there, at least, she would have less of his conversation.

'Les Petits Chevaux,' perhaps the best known of all French watering-place games, is not a very reckless or ruinous mode of dissipation—at Trouville, at all events. The fact that the Board has no interest at stake ensures that the game is conducted with exemplary fairness; each of the little leaden horses is 'run to win,' and the greatest plunger cannot lose or gain more than a trifling number of francs on each race. To the large number of sportsmen who, to quote one of Mr. Pinero's characters, 'don't know a horse from a ham-sandwich,' Les Petits Chevaux must be a superior kind of race-meeting, with nothing to pay for a stand, and an event run every four minutes instead of every quarter of an hour.

The speculator has always one chance in eight of gaining seven times his stake, which makes the amusement highly popular with all ages, from shaky old gentlemen and raddled old women, to fresh young girls, and even children, who surround the green cloth and revolving horses as excitedly as if every race were the Derby or the Grand Prix at the very least.

Margot was standing looking on at the scene, which generally amused her for a short time. All the players were so intensely serious over it; there was a desperate scramble to seize a ticket from the rack at the end of the stick with which the croupier went round; bitter jealousies and protestations from the side which he did not happen to visit, for at Trouville there is a limit to the number of tickets sold on each race. The croupiers would ignore dozens of grasping hands, and resist the most bewitching blandishments, with a splendid sense of their own importance; then came the expectant hush as the spring was pulled, and the gaily-coloured 'field' went spinning round and round, gradually to separate, slacken, and stop, one by one, until the umpire triumphantly announced the number of the winner, and the cashier paid all holders of the corresponding ticket. She saw many of the regular visitors, some who came in time for the opening race about half-past eight and stayed till ten or eleven; there was the grim old lady with a mouth like a purse, whose husband paid the francs whilst she pocketed any winnings; there was the old Anglo-Parisian who sat in the front row with lack-lustre eyes and took a chance as seldom as possible; there was the stout person with the pretty face and the bare hands which had such a subtle vulgarity in their movements. Close by were a young married couple trying the effect of a sprig of white heather they had found that morning on the cliff, and a little overdressed child whose mother, in an eccentric hat and toilette, had given her a franc to try her fortune with.

Near Margot was an old Frenchman who, from constant attendance, had come to acquire a profound knowledge of metal horseflesh; he could tell as soon as the field began to thin which horse would stop first and where, and was equally excited whether he had any money on the race or not. He resembled other sporting prophets in that his anticipations were not invariably corroborated by the result.

'Are you going to have a try, eh?' said Allen to her; 'I'll get you a ticket.' Miss Chevening declined the offer; she objected to being under the slightest obligation to him; her pride, too, made her dislike to join in the undignified scramble for francs in that mixed assembly.

'Well,' said Allen, 'I think I'll have a go in, if you don't mind waiting a bit.'

'Here, *ici*!' he cried, as the croupier went by with his rack and the little saucer underneath for the coins; he snatched a ticket. ‘Number three,’ he said, ‘hasn’t won since we’ve been here. I’m lucky at all this sort of thing. I won a pot the other evening.’

‘I can quite imagine that,’ said Margot, with a curling lip, ‘you are so very careful not to lose, you see.’

‘Oh, I’ve a head on me,’ he agreed. ‘What’s that fellow calling out?’

‘He is saying that somebody has not paid for his ticket,’ said Margot. ‘Not very honourable, if it was done on purpose, was it?’

‘Some of these French fellows are up to any dodge,’ he answered, and the cashier, having received no reply to his demand for the missing stake, emptied the saucer into his partitioned box with a shrug.

A curly-haired boy with a saintly face, like the type of the pattern orphan in moral engravings, was pushing the horses into position for a new start, and the race began. ‘Le quatre est bon!’ said the old Frenchman encouragingly to a neighbour, ‘le quatre est très bon.’

But No. 4 stops under one of the brass arches on the wrong side of the post. ‘Ce sera le sept,’ he announced with authority, as No. 7 came gliding nearer and nearer the post. ‘Ah, non, il a passé’ (with the deepest melancholy), ‘il va mourir . . . . il est mort!’

‘Didn’t I tell you!’ cried Allen. ‘Look at three going as strong as ever, he’ll just romp in—you see!’

Margot took no notice of him: ‘Ce sera le deux,’ said the infallible Frenchman again, ‘ou le trois!’ he added.

‘It’s a dead heat,’ said Allen, who seemed much excited. ‘I do call it cruel luck, don’t you?’ but she would not answer.

The umpire was measuring the distance from the horses’ noses to the post with a piece of string. ‘Le trois!’ he declared, with a grin, ‘l’excellent trois, messieurs et mesdames!’ and he gave the unsuccessful No. 2 a contemptuous jerk back to the starting point.

‘Here!’ shouted Allen to the cashier, ‘ici avec la monnaie—c’est moi, j’ai le trois: regardez!’

‘I wouldn’t excite myself,’ said Margot contemptuously; ‘they are not likely to cheat you—*they* play quite fairly!’

‘By Jove!’ he exclaimed suddenly, ‘I half think it was *me* who forgot to put the two francs in—they’re in my waistcoat pocket now.’

‘I am sure it was you,’ said Margot, ‘I was watching.’

He laughed: ‘I’ve done them finely,’ he said; ‘it was “heads I won, tails they lost,” and no mistake that time. But I didn’t mean to, you know,’ he added. ‘I was in such a hurry, I didn’t notice. I call that a good joke, though, eh?’

‘People’s ideas of jokes are so different,’ said Margot, as he pocketed his winnings. ‘Have you won enough?’

‘Wait a bit,’ he said; ‘I must have another shot. Hear what they’re calling out. “Qui désire de la monnaie?” I thought we all wanted money—I do!’

'He is only offering small change,' Margot said, as she glanced at him with a weary disgust.

The principal croupier and umpire, who seemed to regard his duties in a frivolous light, was holding up the remaining ticket on his rack. 'C'est le huit, messieurs, le beau huit, l'excellent huit. Qui veut le huit?'

'Here, I'll have it,' said Allen, and secured it. 'You saw me pay *that* time!' he remarked to Margot, who had not been listening or attending to anything of this.

Again the innocent-faced boy marshals the field into line and retires meekly to put more tickets into their slits on the racks; again the horses spin round.

Eight, as the experienced Frenchman remarks wisely, is always a sluggish animal, and he is true to his reputation on this occasion, for he comes to a standstill half way from the post.

Allen says, 'No luck this time,' and tears up his ticket, while the other horses are still circulating at various rates of speed. But now occurs a curious turn of fortune—all but two have stopped in the rear of number eight; the survivors are gently nearing the winning-post amidst the keenest interest, their impetus being just sufficient to send them past it, and by the rules of the game, to disqualify them from winning, so that the despised number eight, being now the first on the left side of the post, actually becomes the winner after all.

Allen had torn up his ticket, but the floor was strewn with discarded tickets of all numbers, and he picks up one which bears the winning number, but which is of a different colour from the original.

'Voilà—c'est moi—j'ai gagné!' he bawls, as the cashier—not the person who sold him the ticket paper—looks at it and pushes it aside contemptuously. 'Here!' shouts Allen, 'payez-moi, do you hear? Vite! it's all right, I tell you; this young lady will tell you it's all right. Miss Margot, tell them how it was!'

He looked round as he spoke, and found himself alone.

Outside one of the large glass doors of the saloon devoted to the Petits Chevaux, sat Mrs. Chevening and Mr. Chadwick. 'You know,' he had said, as he dropped his cigar ash into the tub of an adjoining orange-tree, 'I don't pretend that boy of mine is as smart as I should like to see him, but I'm not going to have him looked down on.'

'But indeed,' murmured Mrs. Chevening, with her eyes upon the slanted spears which supported the canvas above the band-kiosk, and which now stood bare against the starlight, 'indeed, dear Mr. Chadwick, it is so very unlikely that anyone could do that. And when he has been a little more in the society of nice English girls——'

'Well,' he said, 'there's your Miss Margot—she's a nice girl enough, but it strikes me she don't take to him as much as I should like to see.'

'How can you say so!' cried Mrs. Chevening.

'Margot's is such a very peculiar nature, so slow in according her friendship—there she is like me—but *most* loyal when her friendship has once been given! I could tell you many instances which would quite convince you that she and your Allen are admirable friends now—you must have noticed how constantly they are together. I assure you, I never remember her allowing anyone to monopolise her society before. I was quite surprised.'

'They are a good deal together,' he admitted. 'I suppose, as you say so, they get on better than they seem to.'

'Surely you must see for yourself how much his manners have altered for the better—it is a little education in itself, being really intimate with a frank, fresh, highbred girl as, although I am her mother, I can't help seeing that she is; and there is no idea of anything but ordinary friendship on either side. Margot is quite free from any foolish desire to turn a boy's head—you need not be afraid of that.'

'If she chose to turn it, and marry him, I don't know that I should have much to say against it,' said Chadwick; 'but I daresay that wouldn't suit *you*—you don't mind associating with us out here, but if it came to any talk of more, why, it would be good-night, I suppose?'

'You are very, *very* unjust!' said Mrs. Chevening. 'Who am I to have any ridiculous notions of that sort? Can you possibly imagine—I—I——You evidently do not understand the value I put upon our acquaintance.

I have been quite dreading to think how soon it would be over!'

'How over?' asked Chadwick; 'we're not so very far from London, where you live. I shall run up now and then, if I don't take a house in town for the season next year. It needn't be over, unless you like.'

'People always *say* that,' she returned; 'but you will have found other friends in your county before that time, and you will soon think it a bore to come all the way to Chiswick to call on us. I am sure Margot will miss her friend Allen—she is so very constant, poor dear.'

'Do you mean what you're saying?' he replied, bending forward; 'because ——'

But Mrs. Chevening was not destined to hear the conclusion of this sentence; for just at that moment a shadow fell between them, and, as they looked up, they saw Margot standing by the orange tree. 'Mr. Chadwick,' she said, with a calmness which seemed to cost her some effort, 'I think you had better go to your son. He is making rather a disturbance in there.'

'Eh, what? Allen!' said Chadwick, rising. 'What is the matter?'

'You had better ask him,' said Margot; 'but there is really no time to be lost.'

He went in at once, and Margot caught her mother's arm: 'Let us go, mother, quick—before they come back! I can't speak to him, I can't!' she said hurriedly. Her eyebrows were contracted, and her eyes looked dark and excited in the glare that came through the open doors. Mrs. Chevening saw at once that something was very wrong indeed. 'Don't ask me about it here—let us go, let us get away from this place first!' said Margot.

'You will certainly be better at home,' said her mother, suppressing her displeasure as well as she might, as they went down by the steps from the terrace, and one of the black-liveried and silver-chained *huissiers* obsequiously let them through the gate.

When they were walking along the planks in the darkness, Mrs. Chevening said: 'Now, perhaps, you will tell me what this means.'

'He tried to cheat, mother!' cried Margot. '*Twice!* I thought it might be a mistake the first time—but the second they found him out, and he dared—he dared to try to get *me* to screen him!'

'What did you say to him? What did you do?'

'I? Nothing. I left him and came to you; and he was making such a scene—everyone was looking at us! Oh, mother, if you knew how ashamed I feel to have been there!'

Margot's indignation and disgust were not unnatural under the circumstances, for, as it happened, the number which Allen had drawn on the occasion had not attracted her attention. She had heard him say his horse had lost and had seen him tear up his ticket, and so she was horrified to see him pick up another and present it as if he had won.

Policy induced Mrs. Chevening to take a charitable and, though she did not suspect it, a correct view of the matter. 'You must have been mistaken,' she said; 'it is absurd to imagine that a young man who has plenty of pocket-money, as I know, would cheat for a few paltry francs!'

'I am not mistaken,' said Margot; 'I was there and saw it. If he has plenty it makes it all the worse. I am not surprised; I knew he was like that. I forced myself to endure him because you wished it; you will not ask me to humiliate myself any longer after this. You will not, will you?'

'I am sure it can all be explained,' said Mrs. Chevening.

'If you like to listen to any explanations, of course he may give them, but not to *me*. I will never speak to him again. I mean it, mother. I have borne it too long. You must tell him not to expect that I shall take the slightest notice of him.'

'That is absurd!' said her mother; 'how can you avoid it in a place like this?'

'I will avoid it. I will keep in my room rather than see him and have to speak to him; if he meets me and dares to behave as if nothing had happened, he shall know what I think of him!' declared angry Margot.

'Then, my dear,' said Mrs. Chevening, 'you will do more mischief than you have any idea of.'

CHAPTER VIII

AN UNEXPECTED DELIVERANCE

> O, he's as tedious
> As is a tired horse, a railing wife;
> Worse than a smoky house:—I had rather live
> With cheese and garlic in a windmill, far,
> Than feed on cakes, and have him talk to me!
> *Henry IV. Part I. Act 3.*

> Gone, and the light gone with her, and left me in shadow here!
> Gone—flitted away,
> Taken the stars from the night and the sun from the day!
> *The Window.*

Mrs. Chevening said no more just then, and Margot, having given expression to her long pent-up indignation, was wise enough to remain content, so that they reached the Californie in silence. Two tired waiters, possibly the equestrians of that afternoon, were reposing on the divans in the hall, and rose guiltily as they entered. As Margot sat opposite her mother in the lift she thought how sharp and haggard her features looked. 'I'm tired, mother,' she said, as soon as they were alone in the sitting-room of their suite; 'and I'm sure you are. I think I'll go to bed at once.'

'You will stay for a few minutes, if you please,' said Mrs. Chevening, as she untied her evening cloak with hands that were not as steady as usual. 'I want to talk to you a little first, about—about the Chadwicks.'

Margot sat down with a resigned air. 'Haven't we talked about them enough?' she protested.

'I want to know if you were serious in what you said down there. Am I to understand that you mean to decline all intercourse whatever with that boy—or what?'

'I should like to, but I suppose I can't really do that without a fuss. I shall certainly refuse to go anywhere alone with him.'

'You know perfectly well that I have never wished you to do that at any time—I have always been close at hand.'

'But I have had to walk with him, to sit next to him, listen to him,' cried Margot impetuously. 'I will not do that any more.'

'You mean to show him publicly that you do not consider him fit to speak to you?'

'He is *not* fit to speak to me,' she said proudly. 'Even if this had never happened, mother, you must know really that I ought not to be forced to treat him as an equal; his very accent is enough, he is hopelessly common and underbred. I bore everything till to-night; but can you wish me to let myself be seen with some one who has been found out cheating in a public place like that?'

'I will spare you all future annoyance from him,' said Mrs. Chevening; 'but I must have your promise that you will act sensibly about this. The poor young man has been badly brought up, and that is very deplorable, no doubt, but we ought to pity him. I can't believe myself that you have not been mistaken in what you thought you saw; but think of his poor father's feelings if you humiliate his son as you seem bent upon doing.'

'Is it my fault if he behaves so as to deserve it?' she said.

'Mr. Chadwick may be a valuable friend to us some day,' retorted her mother. 'You know nothing of the world, Margot, nor how every year makes it more difficult for me to live and keep out of debt. Your brother and sisters are growing up, and I lie awake night after night, wondering how I am to provide for them all, and what will become of them if anything happens to me. But you think nothing of anyone but yourself—you leave me to make all the sacrifices, to bear all the burden alone—you will do nothing to help!'

'Does that mean,' Margot exclaimed, 'that you hope Mr. Chadwick will lend you money? Surely we have not sunk to that!'

'You must mean to insult me by even suggesting such a thing!' said Mrs. Chevening passionately. 'How am I to make you understand that it is your duty to me, to your brother and sisters, to obey me in what I ask? You must not allow this young man to see any difference in your manner—do you hear?—you must not! I must have your promise before you leave the room.'

Margot's hands were entwining themselves feverishly upon the gaudy velvet table-cover. 'Mother dear,' she said earnestly, 'it's no use; if I gave a promise I could not keep it; it is asking too much—it is indeed! I know what you want; you are hoping that I might bring myself some day to accept him. I told you before that I could not do that—not even for you and the others. You must give up the idea—nothing would ever make me listen for a single moment!'

'Am I to tell you again,' said her mother impatiently, 'that I am not asking you to do anything of the sort? I simply ask you to have a little charity, a little patience, not to do or say anything that can make any breach. Come, you will not be so obstinate and unreasonable as to refuse that?'

It seemed to Margot that if she did not make a stand then, she would find herself pledged to more than she could fulfil. She felt absolutely unable to promise to restrain the contempt she felt for Allen Chadwick after what had happened—it was not right that she should be called upon to do so.

'I do refuse,' she said firmly; 'I detest him, and I wish him to know that I do.'

'Then,' said Mrs. Chevening, 'I will not keep you here, you shall go back to-morrow.'

If she had any hope of impressing her daughter by this threat, she was undeceived.

'Do you mean it—really mean it?' cried Margot. 'Go back to Littlehampton to-morrow and see the children again—get away from those two Chadwicks? Mother, it sounds too delightful to be true!'

'Delightful or not,' replied her mother frostily, 'I mean what I say. I shall go with you as far as Honfleur to-morrow, and see you on board the Littlehampton boat; so you had better have all your things ready in time for the mid-day diligence.'

'Then you are not going to Littlehampton, too?' cried Margot in surprise.

'Certainly not, at present. I am very well content with Trouville, and I can trust myself, though it seems I cannot trust my daughter, to stay for a few days without insulting people who are only anxious to be our friends. It is no pleasure to me to travel any distance with a disobedient, ungrateful girl, I assure you.'

Margot tried to assume a proper degree of concern, but in her joy at this unhoped for escape, it is to be feared that her mother's displeasure did not cloud her spirits very perceptibly, and her chief alarm that night was lest Mrs. Chevening should change her mind by morning.

But that lady was evidently in earnest; she secured places by the diligence and sent off a telegram to Miss Henderson, her governess, at the earliest possible moment, and so managed matters that Margot and she were on the top of the shabby old Honfleur diligence which was toiling up the hill above Trouville at the very time when Mr. Chadwick and his son were searching for them diligently on the sands.

Margot drew a deep breath of relief as they came out on the level road along the cliff. Behind lay Trouville and Deauville glancing and shining in the sun. Pleasant as were some of the memories they held, her more recent experiences made her anxious to turn her back on them. There she could just make out the imposing mass of the Casino at the landward end of the long curved jetties with the white lighthouses, as it all lay spread out below. Devoutly she thanked Providence that she would never again be compelled to walk through those rooms under Allen Chadwick's escort. And on her left was the sparkling blue sea which she would cross that night, to find herself by morning at Littlehampton, with Ida and Reggie, and her favourite Lettice. What a relief the placid respectability of that not too lively watering-place would be after Trouville! So she mused, and her spirits grew lighter and lighter as the diligence jingled drowsily along under the branching trees, through Hennequeville with its little church, where Margot had seen the model votive-ships hanging up from the dim rafters, past Villerville with its narrow empty streets of tall houses, and down into hilly Honfleur.

The Littlehampton steamer was lying alongside one of the quays, and was to start at dusk, and Mrs. Chevening, who had preserved an injured silence throughout the drive, secured a passage, and Margot and she had a parting meal, which neither found an agreeable one, at one of the hotels before going on board the boat.

'I must leave you now,' said Mrs. Chevening coldly. 'I wish you had not compelled me to send you away in this manner, but I have spoken to the stewardess, and Miss Henderson will meet you at Littlehampton, so you will be safe enough. Good-bye, Margot. I hope on reflection you will see how foolish and wrong you have been.'

'Good-bye, dear,' said Margot, a little piteously, 'don't be angry with me, and—and you will be with us very soon, won't you?'

'You will hear—that is, I shall let Miss Henderson know when to expect me.'

And Mrs. Chevening, after going on board the packet and confiding Margot to the care of the stewardess, with a recommendation to keep as much in the ladies' cabin as possible, departed to catch the return diligence to Trouville. She did not altogether like leaving her in this way, but she had no other course, unless she quitted Trouville too, which did not suit her convenience. Margot, besides, was perfectly capable of taking care of herself, and the governess would be on the quay to meet her next morning.

Margot was conscious of being in disgrace, and, though she was too proud to show it, she felt the frigidity with which her mother took leave of her. Still her chief sensation was always relief—relief at the knowledge that by to-morrow she would have put the Channel between herself and her incubus, Allen Chadwick. She could not repent of the firmness which had procured her release. And then she was going to her family, the sisters and brother who were more to her than anyone else in the world. So that, before the steamer left the harbour, Miss Chevening had forgotten all that was unpleasant and fallen asleep in a state of perfect contentment.

Nowhere on Trouville sands could Mr. Chadwick discern the becoming foulard costume which was Mrs. Chevening's usual morning dress. He felt a little lost without a companion to whom he had grown so accustomed, and his son did not succeed in consoling him for the deprivation.

At *déjeuner* she and her daughter were absent from their usual places, but still he merely thought that they were away on some excursion for the day. 'If she'd told me she wanted to go anywhere,' he repeated, 'we could have all gone together.' Allen said nothing for some time, until, late in the afternoon, he put into words a fear that had been growing. 'You don't think they've gone for *good*?' he suggested.

'Without so much as a good-bye, after the way we've been about together?' said his father. 'No, I certainly don't think that. But it's odd, because at the Casino last night——'

'Do you think she—they were angry with me for having that row with the cashier chap?' said Allen flushing. 'That was when I last saw Miss Margot. I looked round, and she was gone. I've been wondering why ever since.'

'Do you know why she went, eh? She came to tell me you were in a mess of some sort, and ask me to go to you. What do you think of *that*? She was as flustered and eager as if you'd been her own brother. I believe she thought the establishment were going to do something very bad to you!'

A great weight was off Allen's mind; he was overjoyed to hear for the first time that stately Miss Chevening had concerned herself on his account; it gave a new fervour to his devotion. He had been tormenting himself with fantastic fears that she had resented his playing at the Petits Chevaux, and had gone away in disgust.

'So she *did* stay, till that began?' he exclaimed. 'I wish she had seen the finish of it. Why, they gave in directly they saw I was the only claimant. I wasn't going to see them do me out of my winnings, no fear, if I *had* torn up the ticket!'

'Well, you can tell her all about it at dinner to-night. She regularly frightened me at first. I expected to find you in for a duel—pistols or swords—first thing in the morning! She was so upset she got her mother to take her home at once, and that's how we missed them.'

But at the *table d'hôte* that evening Mr. Chadwick found one of the waiters drawing back Mrs. and Miss Chevening's chairs for two strangers. 'Here, garçon, hold on,' he said, 'those two are engaged—those ladies, who always sit here—you know that well enough.'

'Pardon, but they have leave; they have their baggages by the omnibus for the diligence to Honfleur this morning. I was to see them depart,' said the waiter with a grin.

Mr. Chadwick was plainly highly disconcerted by this information, though he passed it off at the time. ‘All right,’ he said; ‘it’s all the same to me—don’t like seeing people turned out of their proper seats, that’s all.’

But afterwards he waxed exceedingly bitter over it to Allen. *I* can’t understand it,’ he said over and over again; ‘it beats me. I suppose I’ve been away from England so long. But if ever a woman regularly went out of her way to be friendly, she did. And the money I’ve spent to make things pleasant and agreeable for her! Not that I grudge it, that’s neither here nor there; but to go off without a word or even a line to say she was sorry to have to go, or hoped we might meet again, or anything of the sort! If that’s Society manners, all I can say is, no more fine ladies for me! Just make use of you as long as it’s convenient, and then throw you off like one of their gloves! I’m downright disgusted with the pair of them. I thought they had more gratitude!’

‘Perhaps they couldn’t help themselves—I mean, going away so suddenly,’ suggested Allen; it was what he wanted to believe himself, and anything that was a reflection on Margot gave him a curious pain. The suggestion, however, drew down his father’s anger upon his own head.

‘Couldn’t help themselves? You don’t know what you are talking about! I tell you they could have helped themselves if they’d chosen to. And now I come to think of it, it’s as likely as not that

that precious affair at the Casino last night did the business!'

'But,' stammered Allen, 'didn't you say Miss Margot came and told you to come to me? There was no disgrace in what I did!'

'The mother may have got hold of some garbled account. She's a proud tempered woman, and naturally she wouldn't like her daughter to be seen going about with a fellow who'd got himself mixed up in a public row at the Casino. About a few paltry francs, too!' he burst out, allowing his wrath to escape by this convenient channel. 'I wish to God you could break yourself of these low ways and behave more like a gentleman! I'd have paid you the money ten times over sooner than have this happen! What's the good of my going and making acquaintances if you drive 'em out of the place?'

This was the first time that Mr. Chadwick had spoken to his son in anger, and the first time, also, that he had ever seemed to show any consciousness of his son's deficiencies. Allen was silent, stunned almost by this tirade; but what affected him chiefly was a terrible fear that his father was right.

The blow had been bitter enough as it was; he could hardly realise even yet that he had lost his beautiful companion without the slightest warning; but the thought that his own folly was the cause was intolerable. Yet he made no effort to defend himself; he felt a singular reluctance to speaking of Miss Chevening to his father at all, and he dreaded lest, if he said anything more, he might be compelled to give up the last lingering hope that he had had no share in bringing about her sudden departure.

Miss Chevening had been, for her, quite gracious of late, and he had never—luckily for his peace of mind—suspected the dislike and contempt that lay beneath her passive endurance of him. As he became more at ease with her, he found himself able to talk, and her replies gave him no impression other than that she was a little absent-minded sometimes.

So that Allen, for the first time in his life, had passed a sort of enchanted existence, privileged to accompany, day after day, this lovely princess who hardly seemed to belong to ordinary life, and whom he did not expect to treat him quite as an equal. It was enough for him that she allowed him to be with her, spoke to him now and then of her own accord, and smiled, ever so indifferently, on rare occasions.

She was gone; all the people and things he saw had associations of some kind with her. He noted them inwardly as he walked on by his father's side, and at each he felt his heart grow sorer and heavier, and he hardly heard the elder man's stormy reproaches as his anger vented itself in rapid alternation upon Mrs. Chevening, her daughter, and his son. Anyone who had seen the pair walking along the resounding boards would have noticed no more than a high-coloured, loose-mouthed man apparently lecturing a sulky, common-looking youth, who appeared absolutely unimpressed, and impenitent. Of the utter blankness, the inward dragging pain that Allen was feeling, he gave and could give no sign whatever.

So throughout the remainder of that miserable day Mr. Chadwick indulged his feelings, and Allen listened with a sense that nothing mattered very much now; he would almost rather have been still drudging away at his desk in the city warehouse than suffer the desolation that had come upon him.

The next morning, when they came in to *déjeuner*, Mr. Chadwick still occupied with his grievance, there sat Mrs. Chevening in her usual place, fresh and smiling and serene! Allen felt his heart leap. Had a miracle happened, then? Would he see Margot again after all?

His father stared as if he had seen a ghost; he could not throw off his resentment all at once—it had struck too deep; he nodded brusquely as he sat down.

'They told me here you'd left Trouville,' he said; 'did you think better of it or what?'

'Surely you had a better opinion of me than that!' cried Mrs. Chevening plaintively. 'As if I should have gone away altogether without thanking you for all your kindness. What *must* you think of me?'

'Well, so long as you're not gone,' said Chadwick, his face clearing; 'we couldn't think, my boy and I, what had become of you all yesterday.'

'It was all so very sudden,' said Mrs. Chevening, who had prepared herself for this emergency; 'you know I have left my younger darlings at Littlehampton, in lodgings, my second girl is so delicate. Well, only yesterday morning, Margot had a letter in which Ida begged her so pathetically not to stay away much longer that Margot insisted that she must be worse and begged to go at once. Dear Margot is so perfectly devoted to Ida, and she to her; and so, though it was quite absurd, as I told her, and I really couldn't leave Trouville myself so soon, unless I was wanted, I saw it would be too cruel to keep Margot, and I took her over to Honfleur and put her on board the boat for Littlehampton. Poor darling, it was only her sense of duty made her go. She was quite sorry to go when it came to parting!'

Like many of Mrs. Chevening's mis-statements, this contained a certain amount of truth; there *had* been a letter, which came as they were starting, and which expressed Ida's longing for her sister's return.

Allen's hopes subsided as quickly as they had risen, and yet his worst fears were relieved—she had not left on his account.

'Sorry she deserted us like that,' said his father; 'but very creditable to her, I'm sure. Allen will have to amuse himself alone now.'

'Dear Margot was so anxious that I should explain,' said her mother mendaciously, 'she quite hoped to have seen him before leaving. I was to deliver all manner of kind messages. She is so warm-hearted; she felt so afraid of seeming ungrateful, and I think she will miss her Trouville companion,' she added graciously.

Allen coloured to the eyes: 'I shall miss *her*, ma'am,' he said awkwardly; but he was almost consoled—she had remembered him, she liked him better than she had let him see, then—he fell into a rapture of adoration at the thought.

Later, when he had gone, and Mr. Chadwick was sitting with Mrs. Chevening alone in the big hall, he said, still a little suspiciously: 'What made you leave the Casino the other evening so suddenly?'

Mrs. Chevening had her answer ready: 'It was very foolish of me,' she said, 'but Margot was so terribly upset—she thought Allen was in some trouble, and I really had to take her home. You know—or perhaps you don't know—that she almost looks upon him as a sort of big brother, she was so interested in him from the very first. I hope,' she ventured, feeling herself on rather delicate ground, 'that there was no—no quarrel or unpleasantness?'

'Lord, no!' said Mr. Chadwick; 'it was their mistake—they acknowledged it before I came up,'—and he explained how the affair had ended.

'Poor Allen!' Mrs. Chevening commented; 'how insolent these croupier men are! Margot will be so anxious to hear how it ended, she spoke of nothing else all the evening. How clever of him to insist on his rights and not let himself be cheated!'

'Oh, he's a smart chap—in some ways,' said his father, in whose opinion Allen was now quite restored. 'That's where a business training comes in, you see; makes 'em know the value of money, and take care they're not done. So your Miss Margot was making herself unhappy about it, eh? Well, I like that; I didn't think, between ourselves, she took so much interest in him.'

'You don't know Margot! She does not easily attach herself, but when her liking is once gained—It may sound conceited to say so, but I do think *any* young man might be proud to have my daughter for a friend. She is not easy to please; perhaps you noticed that she would scarcely have anything to say to that Mr. Orme, clever and self-confident as he was.'

'I don't know that I noticed one way or the other,' said Mr. Chadwick bluntly; 'but you don't think there's any chance that Allen might—eh?'

'No,' said Mrs. Chevening, 'oh, dear no, pray don't imagine that for an instant—it is quite what I said; she looks upon him as a big brother, who has never had a sister of his own—a sister can do so much for a young man. I always think, you know, that nothing can *quite* supply the want of female influence in a boy's life.'

'He had his aunt,' said Mr. Chadwick; 'but I know what you mean—he *is* rough, poor chap; he don't feel at home in a drawing-room, even alone with me. I wish I could see my way clearer, for my sake, as well as his!' He said no more at the time—but Mrs. Chevening knew that her words had not been lost upon him.

Margot was able to sleep on board the steamer, which is more than she would have done had she foreseen the kind of colour with which her secession would be invested by her mother's policy. She woke early, however, and went on deck, eager to see the familiar coast-line once more ; and, as she reached the top of the brass-edged steps, she saw a face she did not immediately recognise, though its owner had evidently a better memory. 'You know me well enough, miss, though it may not suit you to own to it,' said the woman, and, at the voice, Margot knew at once that she had had the ill-tempered nursemaid Susan for a fellow-passenger.

Susan was looking, and knew she was looking, wofully green and dishevelled beside Margot, whose face, even in the raw morning air, was almost as fresh and fair as if she had never left the shore. Perhaps this gave an additional acerbity to the maid's manner. 'I've reason enough to remember you, miss,' she added, 'and I shan't forget you in a hurry.'

'I remember you perfectly,' said Margot. 'If the sight of me reminds you to treat your unfortunate charge more kindly, I hope you never will forget me,' and she was about to turn away and think no more of it, but the girl placed herself in her way, and Margot saw that she was trembling with passion.

'I wouldn't be a nippercrit, miss,' she said. 'I'd have the courage of my opinions, I would.'

Miss Chevening's eyes opened to their haughtiest width : 'I haven't the slightest idea what you're talking about,' she said in her low incisive tones ; 'but you needn't explain, I don't want to know in the least.'

'Ah, but I want you to know,' said Susan. 'You don't take *me* in with your innocent ways and pretended ignorance. You look a proud one, but you don't think it beneath you to hound a poor girl out of her place behind her back. My missis, as was a lady if ever there was one, though French, she'd never have give me notice but for tale-tellers coming telling lies against me. I know better, don't talk to me!'

'I don't intend to,' said Margot.

'No, you can't face me—that's how it is,' said Susan, sticking her hands into the pockets of her smart ulster; 'no wonder, taking the bread out of my mouth as you have, and anomalous too—so mean!'

Miss Chevening began to be afraid that a crowd would collect round them, but fortunately the few passengers who were on deck had gone forward and Susan's voice, which was growing louder and more violent, was drowned by the din and carried aft by the breeze.

'Listen to me, you foolish girl,' said Margot; 'if your mistress has sent you away for not treating her son properly, it is only what you deserve and I am glad of it. Still, if you have no friends to go to and want help while you are looking for another place, I would willingly——'

'Take your money after what you've done!' said the girl. 'I'd rather die in the workhouse. Luckily for me, I'm in no want of friends nor money neither, so you won't undo what you've done that way; you must feel yourself you've acted shabby, or you wouldn't make such a offer!'

Margot's patience gave way at this. 'You are an ungrateful idiot,' she said contemptuously, 'or you wouldn't have such ideas at all; but if it gives you any comfort to believe that I accused you secretly, go on believing it by all means, it can make no difference to me; only be so good as to leave me in peace.'

'That's an easy way to put it off,' said Susan; 'but, never mind, perhaps some day your turn'll come, and you'll see how you like such treatment. I've said all I mean to say, and, now you know what I think of you, I'll say good morning and thanks for past favours received and may I live to see 'em returned!'

Margot was indignant, though a little amused, too, that this unamiable girl should regard her as an anonymous persecutor, but she was too supremely indifferent to dream of trying to convince the ex-nurse of her mistake, and perhaps to attempt it might have been trouble thrown away. So Susan landed and went on her way, more firmly convinced than ever that she owed the loss of her situation with the wealthy Parisians to Margot Chevening—instead, as was actually the case, to one of her foreign fellow-servants.

CHAPTER IX

A CLOUD FROM ACROSS THE SEA

It was a week since Margot's abrupt departure from Normandy, and as yet her mother had fixed no date for rejoining her family at Littlehampton, nor for their general return to London. She had written, it was true, but only to Miss Henderson, and to the effect that the lodgings should be retained until she wrote again. 'It's too bad of mother to keep us in this poky little place,' Ida declared fretfully; 'I am quite strong again now, and I'm sure there's nothing here to stay for longer than one can possibly help.' They were walking along the shore towards Worthing—Margot, Ida, and Miss Henderson—and as she spoke Ida turned and looked back at the row of lodging-houses, the windmills, and the unassuming little jetty and lighthouse, which, gilded by the September haze, comprised the main features of Littlehampton. 'Ida, darling,' protested the governess, 'don't be ungrateful—remember what you were when you came, and what you are now.' There was nothing of the invalid in Ida Chevening's appearance just then. Tall—a little too tall, perhaps, for a girl of sixteen—she promised a figure as faultless as her elder sister's when her strength should be completely regained, and the transitionary period was passed. She would be beautiful, too, though her face would never have the animation and decision which made Margot's so difficult to forget. She was indolent and somewhat weak by nature, and delicate health had encouraged her disposition to cling to others. She was impulsive, and, perhaps from being so much in Miss Henderson's company, decidedly sentimental, not to say affected. Miss Henderson was the type of governess least fitted for the charge of a girl of Ida's age and disposition. She was young and produced a first impression of being good-looking—Ida thought her lovely, and was constantly assuring her of the fact. She had a few showy accomplishments, no solid education. She knew how to behave, especially when Mrs. Chevening was present, but it was always behaviour, not breeding, as her patroness perceived clearly enough, though she saw no reason for parting with her on that account. 'Henderson was useful and cheap; she made no inconvenient fuss when her salary was (as happened not infrequently) in arrears; the children liked her, she would do well enough,' thought Mrs. Chevening, who, in fact, could not afford to risk a change. But between Margot and Miss Henderson there was always a certain distance: Miss Chevening instinctively disliking certain slight but unmistakable indications of underbreeding which revealed themselves in the other's more unguarded moments, and the governess perceiving and resenting a coolness which she chose to ascribe to jealousy.

Ida, however, was an enthusiastic heroine-worshipper, and saw no shortcomings. 'If I'm well now,' she said in answer to Miss Henderson's last remonstrance, 'I owe it all to you, dear darling Hennie. I believe I should have died if it hadn't been for you!'

'You were certainly very ill when we came, and that night I sat up with you was an awfully anxious one for us all, dearest Ida,' said the governess. 'That was after you had gone to Trouville,' she explained to Margot.

'I think it was a pity you did not tell us at the time, then,' said Margot; 'the doctor assured us that you were quite out of danger, Ida, or I would never have left you.'

'I wouldn't have you told,' said Ida; 'you mustn't blame poor Hennie.' And she took the governess's hand and fondled it affectionately. To Margot, who had considerable doubts of any real relapse at all, this seemed unhealthy and exaggerated, but she was too deeply attached to her sister to be capable of saying a word to check her effusions, and besides it would only weaken such influence as she still retained over Ida.

'But I am longing to get away from this place,' continued Ida presently, 'it is too horridly slow. Don't you hate it, Margot? But no—I believe you actually *like* it!'

'I believe I actually do,' said Margot, laughing, and she spoke the truth. After all the bustle and glare of

Trouville, there was something restful and quieting in the unpretentious little Sussex watering-place, to say nothing of the unspeakable relief she felt at her deliverance from Allen Chadwick. And it was such a lovely afternoon, with a lazy purple sea lapping far away, and the sky above their heads a perfect azure, repeated in the rills which channelled the sands. There was a touch of autumn chill in the air, and the reeds and bushes along the low coast were turning yellow and russet, but she felt braced and invigorated as she trod the elastic sand, on which the gulls had left their footprints in innumerable little tridents. She was too happy just then to remember with any regret that other shore across the sea where she had had one experience at least that she could look back upon without reluctance. But even Nugent Orme had not left an ineffaceable impression on her mind. Any element of romance Trouville might have contained for her had been slain by other recollections; and, besides, Mr. Orme was in England somewhere. There was not much to inspirit her in that fact, but somehow it filled up the measure of her content in being where she was.

'I can't think how you can endure it!' Ida declared, 'especially after Trouville. I am sure Trouville must have been lovely. I would never have left it till I was obliged. You never tell us anything about what you did there, Margot; it's rather mean of you.'

'There is so very little to tell. I was very glad to get away from it,' said Margot.

'But why? It must have been better fun than this.

Weren't the people at the hotel pleasant? Was it *mother*—or what?'

'Some of the people were—not very pleasant,' said Margot.

'Mother wouldn't know people who were not all right, would she? She's generally so awfully particular.'

'She knew these people,' said Margot; 'they were quite respectable. He was, or had been, an indigo-planter, I believe, and very well off, but—well, I disliked them.'

'Was there a Mrs. Indigo-planter?' inquired Ida; 'was it she?'

'There was only this Mr. Chadwick,' said Margot, looking out to sea, 'and—and his son.'

'*Now* we're beginning to be told something,' said Miss Henderson, slily; 'please go on.'

'There is nothing to tell, Camilla, as it happens,' said Margot.

'But the son made love to you—I'm sure he did; now didn't he?'

'Thank goodness, no; he would not have dared,' said Margot. 'You are so very romantic, Camilla. But it was quite bad enough as it was; and, if you please, we won't talk about it any more; it is over now.'

'Just tell us this, and we won't want to know any more,' said Ida. 'Was he handsome? I'm sure he was handsome—and rather conceited, *wasn't* he, Margot?'

'You are quite a witch, dear,' Margot replied, with rather a malicious little laugh.

'Poor Margot,' said Ida sympathetically; 'never mind, it will all come right in time.'

'It has come right already,' said Margot lightly; 'and now suppose we drop the Chadwicks: it is time to turn back.'

They walked back by the shore, and as they reached Littlehampton and were tramping over the shingle to the modest esplanade, a pretty little figure came fluttering down to meet them.

'Why, Lettice,' said Margot, as the child clung to her hand, 'where's nurse?'

'Nurse? oh, she's playing cricket with Reggie on the green somewhere; she's getting to bowl quite nicely now, you know, though it's a pity she can't bat better. I've been running about with Yarrow, and oh, Margot, I've had quite an adventure! I had been playing cricket with Reggie, but I got him out three times running and he wouldn't *go* (that wasn't fair of him, was it?), so I left him, and then I had the adventure. I was throwing my ball for Yarrow to run after—he wouldn't let me alone till I did—and there was some one—a man, not at all old—lying down on the beach, and—I didn't mean it, but the ball bounced somehow, and oh, Margot, what *do* you think?—it hit him in the eye! I was *dweadfully* sorry' (Lettice was eight, but she was still a little uncertain about her r's when excited, and had to bear some teasing from her brother in consequence), 'but I went up and apologised directly, of course, and he said he wasn't hurt much (it was the india-rubber ball), and then he asked me my name, so of course I told him, and then' (and here Lettice's golden-brown eyes grew larger) 'he asked if I had a sister called Margot, and told me he knew you quite well, and had met you over in France—*did* he meet you, Margot?'

A sudden consciousness deepened Margot's colour; could it be? Was Nugent Orme here? Had he come with any idea of finding her, and if he had——?

'I can't tell till I have seen him, can I?' she said. 'Very likely I have met him.'

'That wasn't all,' said Lettice; 'he asked me—that was when we got more consequential—he asked me "would I mind being his sister some day."'

'He—asked you that?' exclaimed Margot, with a keen resentment. How could Mr. Orme have allowed himself to say such a thing to a child! 'You *must* have misunderstood him, Lettice.'

Lettice shook her head. 'But I didn't, Margot; he said it ever so many times—he told me it was all settled. Only I do *not* understand how I ever can be his sister—do *you*, Margot?'

'No, dear,' said Margot. 'He made a very great mistake if he really told you so.' That Nugent Orme could be guilty of such presumption, should actually take her consent for granted in this way, filled her with the keenest vexation, and yet she found it almost impossible to believe. If it should be true, she felt with some bitterness that whatever place he had begun to occupy in her thoughts would be vacant now. What could she have said or done to give him such an impression? Well, he would learn that he was less irresistible than he seemed to imagine.

'But what was he like, this mysterious person?' questioned Ida, with a mischievous enjoyment of her elder sister's agitation; 'describe him, Lettice.'

Description was not Lettice's strong point. 'He was like—well, not like anything in particular,' she said; 'and I'm sure he said that mother and his father had settled it all, and that I was to be his sister soon.'

'His father!' exclaimed Margot, with a sudden illumination. It was *she* who had taken too much for granted, not Nugent Orme, who had probably never given her a second thought since he left Trouville. And the person who made so sure of her consent was her *bête noire*—the raw lad from whose society she thought she had delivered herself for ever.

'It strikes me,' said Miss Henderson to her, 'we have not been told the whole story of your little Trouville romance yet, dear. When are we to know all?'

'Run on to the house and tell them we're coming, Lettice,' said Margot; and waiting till the child had gone, she turned to the governess: 'There is nothing to know,' she said, a little haughtily. 'I hate that kind of joking, Camilla. If you saw him, you would understand how it annoys me. But what is the use of talking about it? Nothing that anyone said would change my mind. If this Chadwick boy—for that is all he is

—is really here, you will see him for yourselves, sooner or later. Then you will know.'

'A foreign postcard from mother,' announced Reggie, who was already seated at the tea-table. 'She'll be here by the steamer to-morrow, and wants Margot to meet her and nobody else. I wonder why we mayn't *all* go!'

Ida looked at Margot with an almost envious interest; she was to be a heroine in a real love-affair, then, this beautiful sister of hers; she would be pressed to accept an unwelcome lover, just as in so many of the novels Hennie and herself had been delighting in of late. Would Margot yield, or remain obstinate? Either way it would be very interesting, Ida thought; she was sure this planter's son was nice really, if Margot would only see it—very likely they had had a quarrel.

Margot was looking forward to meeting her mother with a certain excitement. Evidently this project of uniting her to young Chadwick was not abandoned. Allen himself apparently regarded it as settled. Margot was not afraid; she did not see what new arguments her mother could urge that could shake her determination. There might be cases in which a daughter was bound to sacrifice herself for the family, but this was not one of them; even if it was, she thought, she would have enough strength of mind to repudiate the obligation. No, she felt perfectly safe; no one could force her to marry against her will.

And yet, when she was alone that night and lay in her room, listening to the monotonous roll of the sea, a sudden restless dread overcame her as she thought of the steamer which was even then ploughing its way across the waves; what if it were carrying some sentence which, with all her courage, she would find herself powerless to resist? She rose at last, from some half-superstitious impulse, and went to the window. The amber harvest moon was casting its shimmer on the calm sea and bathing the little harbour and jetty in mellow radiance, but beyond, where the French coast lay, a black cloud loomed up ominously, and seemed to be shooting a long arm across the sky towards her. With a little laugh at her own weakness, Margot drew the blind, and shut out the sight.

Book II.

KICKING AGAINST THE PRICKS

CHAPTER I

SCYLLA AND CHARYBDIS

> Thou sweetest sister in the world, hast never a word for me?
>
> *The Lay of the Brown Rosary.*

MISS CHEVENING had risen betimes next morning and gone down to the quay. It was cold and cloudy, and there was a light autumn fog on the sea, but Margot was sustained against all atmospherical influences just then; she was about to know on what grounds her mother conceived that she could exact her submission. The spirit of opposition was roused, she felt strong enough to meet all appeals with an unflinching negative. And as she passed the quaint old whitewashed hotel, which at that time still stood on an isolated piece of the green, some one, who seemed to have been waiting for this, came out from the porch, and advanced, sheepishly enough, to meet her. Margot watched him with a sardonic amusement; that clumsy bow and self-conscious flush of his pleased her mood just then—*this* was the person her mother considered a suitable companion for her for life.

'I—I thought you'd be likely to come this way,' he said. 'I hope you've been pretty well since I saw you last . . . Margot?' He brought out her Christian name with an evident effort, which by its very abjectness disarmed her to some extent; he seemed too pitiable just then in his humble anxiety to propitiate her.

'I am quite well, Mr. Chadwick,' she said. 'I hardly expected to see you so soon—are you staying here?'

'Came over yesterday with the governor,' he explained; 'I was trying to get a sight of you all day, but I didn't like to give you a look up at your lodgings.'

'That would have been rather an odd thing to do, would it not?' said Margot.

'I wanted to tell you something,' he resumed nervously; 'I—I dare say you'll laugh, but I haven't been able to get out of my mind that perhaps that night before you went away, at the Casino, you fancied——'

'Oh, please!' protested Margot, 'don't let us go back to Trouville! I have forgotten it. I want to forget all that hateful time.'

'No, but listen,' he said. 'I'm going down to meet the boat—we may as well go together;' and he poured into her unwilling ears a rapid vindication of his behaviour at the Petits Chevaux table.

'Very well,' said Margot, as he finished; 'but you need not have given yourself so much trouble to tell me all this, Mr. Chadwick. I don't see that it is of very much importance now, you know.'

'More than ever, now,' he said.

Margot felt driven to bay. 'You seem to me to mean something? You meant something yesterday—if it was really you who spoke to my little sister. Will you kindly explain? Did you, or didn't you, inform her that you meant to—to become her brother very soon?'

'If I did,' said Allen, 'it was nothing but true—surely you've been told all about it!'

'My consent to such a very desirable arrangement was naturally taken for granted!' retorted Margot bitterly; 'still, Mr. Chadwick, you might have paid me the compliment of waiting.'

'I!' exclaimed Allen; 'it was none of my doing!'

'You are extremely candid,' said Miss Chevening, with a slight laugh, 'I will be candid, too. If anyone has persuaded you to believe that I——'

'Stop!' cried Allen, with more delicacy than might have been expected from him, perhaps. 'I see what you're thinking. I know well enough you could never come to look on me in that sort of way—such a thing never entered my head, indeed it didn't Miss—Miss Margot. I know myself better than that. No, it wasn't *that* I meant.'

'I'm afraid I'm very dull,' said Margot, beginning to wish that she could recall that unfortunate speech; 'but what did you mean, then? Because I don't see——'

'Isn't there another way for us all to live together, and me be a kind of brother to your sisters, and—and to you?' he said. 'Your mother——'

Margot stood quite still: her face was deadly white, her eyes blazed with anger. In a flash her mind went back to those days at Trouville, to her mother's marked encouragement of the ex-indigo planter, their constant companionship, the strange anxiety to prevent her from betraying her dislike to the son. In her egotism, she had never suspected that she herself was the least concerned; she had let herself be removed where she could offer no opposition—and now it was too late! Her head whirled in the rush of fierce anger, impotent protest against this humiliation which her own mother had brought upon them!

'I thought you knew!' stammered Allen; 'it was the day after you left, father told me almost directly. Look here, if you don't believe me, come down to the Custom-House—father's there waiting, *he*'ll tell you it's all true!'

'Don't speak to me!' said Margot, closing her eyes for a moment, 'and—and go on to the quay alone, please; you can say, if—if you are asked, that I am not well enough to come—don't talk, go—go!'

She walked back to the little lodging-house parlour and stood in the bow-window looking out over the green, mechanically watching a groom who was exercising a horse there—she felt as if she were going mad.

How long she stood there, with a horrible feeling that her face was a mask with nothing but an aching emptiness behind, she did not know, but presently the children came down to breakfast. 'Hasn't mother come? *why* hasn't mother come? did you go down to see if she was on the steamer—*why* didn't you go down?'

were amongst the questions she had to endure from Reggie and Lettice, until the prawns served as a merciful distraction.

'How pale you look, darling!' said Ida the moment she appeared, 'and—and hasn't mother come? is anything wrong!'

'Yes—no,' said Margot impatiently. 'Mother is quite well, I believe; she will be here directly no doubt.' She shivered as she spoke at the thought of the arrival.

Miss Henderson cast an amused glance at Ida; evidently Margot's heroics were beginning to evaporate. Margot saw the glance—how little they all guessed what was before them! and who was to prepare them? *She* could not, and she sat there in mute misery with a nervous glance at the road whenever the sound of fly-wheels approached.

And, after many false alarms, the dreaded moment came; one of those four-wheeled *struld-brugs* which are only to be seen at watering-places drove up, piled with luggage, and in it, looking rather the worse for the passage, but smiling perseveringly, sat Mrs. Chevening.

The children ran out to welcome her, and Ida and Miss Henderson were on the steps. Margot alone remained within, and listened with a shuddering disgust to the kisses and greetings in the passage outside. How could her mother behave as if nothing was changed, as if she had not deliberately bartered away their old peaceful independent life? But Allen might have been mistaken. The first moment that her mother's eyes met hers, she knew it was all too true—there was a look at once deprecatory and defiant that told her all.

‘Well, Margot dearest, how are you?’ said Mrs. Chevening, in a higher key than ordinary. ‘Not repented deserting Trouville in that absurd manner, I hope?’

Margot shrank a little from her embraces: ‘Not till to-day,’ she said in a low voice.

‘Why, you really don’t look yourself!’ cried Mrs. Chevening. ‘When dear Allen told me you were not well enough to be on the quay, I thought that a lazy fit perhaps— But just come up to my room presently, darling, and we two will have a cosy little chat all to ourselves!’

A little later, when Mrs. Chevening had changed her travelling costume and regained her ordinary appearance, Margot entered the room.

‘You have something to tell me, mother?’ she said.

Mrs. Chevening looked at the proud pale face, with the beautiful mouth arched in a slight curve of irrepressible contempt, and felt slightly uncomfortable. ‘Just see if you can find my hand-glass first, dearest one,’ she said, ‘those Custom-House wretches do make such havoc in one’s dressing-bag. It really is as Joshua said to them——’

‘Is “Joshua” Mr. Chadwick?’ asked Margot; ‘it is true, I suppose—you are going to—to marry him?’

‘What a tragic voice!’ exclaimed Mrs. Chevening; ‘one would think he was an ogre. There are not many men, let me tell you, in his position who would have acted as generously as he has done; he looks upon you all as his own children already; he is ready to provide you with all those advantages which only wealth can afford, which otherwise I should have to see you deprived of for ever.'

'Do you think I should have missed them?' cried Margot.

'That bears out what I always say of you, dearest—you are just a trifle too self-absorbed. I was thinking less of you than of the others. You forget that in—in our happier days, you *had* all these advantages; no expense was spared to give you all the education and accomplishments a girl ought to have on entering the world. Even after my terrible loss, I contrived (you will never know with what efforts) to keep you at Brighton for the full course. It doesn't—it really does *not*—become you now to stand in the way of the younger ones, especially when, as you might know if you cared to, I can hardly tell which way to turn for enough money to keep them decently fed and dressed.'

'Mother,' cried Margot, 'we had always enough, and I would have worked, I would have done anything—*anything* to prevent this!'

'I really don't know in what way you could have earned more than enough to keep yourself; and perhaps you are not aware that my bills are nothing like all paid.'

'Then why are we here? why did we go to an expensive place like Trouville?'

'I went chiefly for your sake, my dear; but I see no reason to repent it, nor, I should think, will those wretched tradesmen who have been worrying my life out so long.'

'You might,' said Margot in a low voice—'you might have remembered papa—it is such a few years since he——'

'You think I have forgotten? How little you know your mother, Margot, if you can say such cruel things! But his constant anxiety was that he was able to save so little for you children, and if he were permitted to advise me now, he would understand and approve—yes, though my eldest daughter presumes to judge and condemn!' and Mrs. Chevening applied a corner of her handkerchief delicately to the corner of each eye.

'Tell me just this,' said Margot, 'do you—oh, it's horrible to say—do you *love* this Mr. Chadwick?—shall you be proud of him? Oh, you cannot, you cannot!'

'I deny your right to put such questions to me,' said Mrs. Chevening; 'I shall do my duty. At our age it would be absurd to pretend to sentiment. If you choose to say so, I am marrying for convenience—but at least it is the convenience of those who are dear to me, and when they turn against me, and speak like strangers, and as if they had nothing but contempt for their poor mother any more—ah, my dear, I trust no daughter of *yours* will ever cut you to the heart as you are cutting me now! How hard—how *wickedly* hard you are to me, Margot!'

'I don't mean to be—I won't be,' she cried, throwing her beautiful strong arms round her mother, 'only give this up—let us be as we were together in our dear old shabby house, with no one to come between us, mother darling, it isn't too late—it will be better in the end. Send Mr. Chadwick away again!'

Mrs. Chevening disengaged herself angrily. 'You are talking like an idiot!' she said; 'I shall certainly keep a promise I consider sacred, so let me hear no more of this.'

'Then,' said Margot wildly, 'let *me* go away!' I cannot live in the same house with them—I could not breathe there—let me go!'

'By all means go,' returned her mother, 'if you wish to make us out monsters in the eyes of the world. Only, as I said before, I am at a loss to see what you propose to do. I don't think your aunt Gwendolen will receive you very warmly; she will probably call you a foolish girl for running away from a comfortable home and one who only desires to be an indulgent father to you. And I doubt whether you would be more independent as a governess, even if you were fit to undertake a situation. One thing you will understand, that if you choose to do anything so headstrong, you will cut yourself off from all of us; and I should have thought you had some affection for your sisters and Reggie at least, if you have none for me! I certainly could not expect or wish Mr. Chadwick to receive you at our new home, after you had shown everybody that you thought yourself too good to associate with him. If you separate from us now, you do so for ever!'

Margot drew a long sobbing breath; she realised the cruel force of her mother's words. All the tenderer side of her nature was expended upon her younger sisters and brother; she was passionately devoted to them, and yet, if she were to carry out her impulsive resolve, and refuse to countenance her mother's act of disloyalty to the dead, there was nothing before her but a life of solitude and slavery. She would be shut out from all she loved, condemned to the employment most uncongenial and unfitted to her nature—teaching. She saw no other resource; she knew too well that, untrained as she was, she could not hope to gain a footing on the stage or the concert-platform, and she shrank from the mere idea of serving in a shop. She felt herself, in the full course of her indignation and passionate protest, brought up short and hemmed in by impenetrable realities against which she was powerless, rebel as she might.

She had not broken down till then, but now, as much with anger as grief, she burst into a passion of tears. 'I can't leave them!' she sobbed. 'Mother, you know it would kill me—oh, what shall I do?'

Mrs. Chevening saw that the battle was almost won. 'Do?' she said; 'do what any sensible girl would do in your place. Give up raging and sulking at a state of things that you can't possibly prevent. Of course you can make your stepfather and me very uncomfortable if you choose. But please be consistent—submit cheerfully, and I really cannot see that you will have any hardships to bear. Or, if you can't do that, carry out your protest and go!'

'Would you be glad for me to go?' demanded Margot.

'You goose, of course not! I want to be proud of my eldest daughter, and see her in surroundings worthy of her, for I needn't tell you, my dear, that you have your share of beauty, though it is completely thrown away in the sort of life we have had to live till now. But I can't have you spoiling everything by posing as a martyr, and refusing to recognise my husband at the very time you are living under his roof and eating his bread; you must see yourself how impossible a state of things that would be!'

'It is not Mr. Chadwick so much,' said Margot, 'it is his son—will *he* be there?'

'Of course he will be there! Do you suppose his father would turn the poor boy out to gratify your convenience? What harm can poor Allen possibly do you?—he is ready to be a devoted son to me and the fondest of brothers to you all. I was quite touched by his real delight when he was told—any other young man in his position would have felt injured, jealous perhaps. And a few sisterly hints, a little patience and tact on your part, Margot, and he would soon grow out of any slight mannerisms he has picked up. I am sure he has an excellent disposition, and will not be difficult to manage. Now pray let me see you looking brave and cheerful, and not acting as a wet blanket any more. Promise me to be sensible.'

'I promise that I won't show what I can't help feeling, just at first, any more than I can help. I can't pretend to be glad, or to be fond of Mr. Chadwick all at once. You won't ask too much?'

'I will be satisfied with that—for the present,' said Mrs. Chevening; 'now kiss me, darling, and go to your room till you are a little more composed.'

So Margot found herself driven to surrender ignominiously. Alone in her room once more, as she thought of the gallant, handsome soldier who had been so proud of her, and had liked to have her with him wherever it was possible in those last few months before he went out to meet his death in Afghanistan, her tears rose afresh. Her mother might forget—but she, never! For the new head of the house she had no respect, no affection, but she would keep her compact with her mother as far as outward show went. But there was Allen—and at the thought of him she set her teeth and clenched her soft hands in angry revolt.

There would be no escape from him now—never: he would live in the same house, he would have the right of treating her as his equal, of speaking of her, and to her, as his sister. Even while he was nothing to her but an accidental acquaintance, she had conceived an antipathy to him which she felt herself was exaggerated—but now that antipathy had turned to hatred: yes, she hated him, though till then she had held him beneath the dignity of hatred; she hated him for what she well knew he had no more part in bringing about than herself.

And—bitterest and most unpalatable of all—this hatred which possessed her must be confined to her own breast; only in secret could she dare to give herself the luxury of expression. From its object it must be rigorously hidden.

There may be some, perhaps, to whom Allen Chadwick will seem scarcely less to be pitied. Mere unrequited affection is too ordinary a woe to excite much compassion; it is only when humble unselfish devotion on one side is met with deep-seated invincible aversion on the other that the situation has something of a tragic side to it.

CHAPTER II

DELF AND CHINA

> The little hearts that know not how to forgive!
>
> *Maud.*

MARGOT'S passionate resentment had worn itself out for the time being, and she grew tired of being miserable alone. There were the others, too, who were probably still in ignorance of what was impending; a sense of loyalty to them made her wish to prepare them. As she expected, she found them with Miss Henderson in a small sitting-room at the back, which was generally reserved for lessons on wet days; even before she opened the door sounds of subdued wailing within told her that she was too late—they knew all. It was a doleful little gathering enough: Ida, with red eyes and a look of tragic despair, was holding tightly to the governess's hand, which she caressed from time to time as they sat on the shiny little sofa. Miss Henderson had assumed an air of martyred resignation suitable to the occasion, though she was inwardly deeply perplexed as to the effect these changes were to have upon her future. If only she could retain her post, things might not be so bad after all; in the meantime a really interesting woe like the present was too great a luxury not to be indulged in to the full, and both Ida and she (although perhaps they did not know it) had derived considerable enjoyment from it already. Their tears broke out afresh on Margot's entrance; Ida and Lettice threw themselves sobbing into her arms; Reggie went to the window, which commanded a not too lively prospect of cistern, back-garden, and slate-roofed stables, and stood there whistling in a dismal quaver. Miss Henderson wept in a discreet manner on the sofa, behind a handkerchief with a highly ornamental border.

'Isn't it too awful!' cried Ida indistinctly; 'I call it simply horrid of mother to do this. Behind all our backs too! Margot, you were there—you must have known—why didn't you stop it? you might at least have prepared us!'

'How could I?' said Margot. 'Do you think if I had known—but I was kept in the dark too.'

'It will kill me—I know it will!' moaned Ida; 'just as I was getting well, too! How *can* mother? What miserable girls we are!'

'It's as bad for me as you, every bit,' broke in Reggie, with a suspicious sniff, 'only I d-don't b-blub about it!'

'Margot, shall we all have to be somebody else, too, if mother is?' asked Lettice, 'or what? Will nothing ever be the same any more?'

'Of course it won't!' said Ida disconsolately; 'we shall be nobodies, now: the first thing will be that poor dear Hennie will be sent away, and we shall have to get on anyhow. I dare say we shall be turned out, too, some day—he'll be sure to hate us all! and there's a step-brother, a young man—he'll never rest till he's per—persecuted us out of the house! I know what it will be. Margot and I will have to hem shirts (and I *hate* sewing), and Reggie will sell papers, and Lettice mum—mum—matches, and we shall all die of cold on doorsteps!'

At this affecting prophecy she went into fresh floods of tears, and threw herself inconsolable upon the sofa again, whereupon a general chorus of lamentation arose. Margot, however, did not join in it, feeling the scene, in fact, a parody upon her own reception of her mother's announcement; she could not see it in a humorous light just then, but it made her angry and a little ashamed.

'For goodness' sake, don't let us make idiots of ourselves any more!' she exclaimed; 'we shall be treated kindly enough, if that is all, I dare say. It is quite bad enough without trying to make it worse!'

'Is his name Chadwick?' demanded Ida. 'Wasn't that the name of the people you disliked so at the hotel?'

'Never mind what I told you once,' said Margot, 'and—and I never said that I disliked the father particularly.'

'It was the son, then, and you really *did* hate him? Hennie and I were not quite sure whether you meant it. What is he like? do tell us!'

'You will see for yourself quite soon enough,' said Margot; 'he is a terrible person!'

'A terrible person!' cried Lettice. 'Oh, Margot!

and they are here—both of them. We saw their hats over the railings. Such horrid-looking hats!'

Steps were heard blundering up the stairs outside; Margot's face paled slightly. 'They're coming,' she whispered; 'dry your eyes—quick, don't let them see we have been crying.'

A knock, violent from timidity, and Allen appeared—alone. 'It's only me,' he announced with an embarrassed appeal to Margot. 'Your mother said if I came up, you'd introduce me, and—and make things comfortable all round.'

Margot was leaning lightly against the head of the sofa, which she was smoothing as delicately as if it were some favourite animal; she lifted her eyebrows at his remark with a careless disdain.

'Were those mother's exact words, I wonder?' she said; 'but I can't introduce you unless you will come out of that doorway.' ('He looks exactly as if he had come to wind the clock!' she was thinking.) 'That is better—do you mind shutting the door? Now we can get it done. This is our new brother. Mr. Allen Chadwick—Miss Henderson. This is my sister Ida, and this is Lettice, and that is Reggie.'

Allen made fumbling attempts to shake hands all round. 'I—you mustn't think I've any wish to intrude,' he said; 'it's rum at first, I know, but everything must have a beginning, eh? And as for Margot here, why I and she are quite old friends—though I'm sure when we first met I'd no more idea we should come to be such near relations—had you?'

'I!' said Margot; 'no, certainly *not*!'

'No more you hadn't,' he said; 'why, do you remember this morning how taken aback you were when I told you?'

'Do I remember?' repeated Margot; 'why yes, I have some faint recollection of it.'

'Mine isn't faint,' he said without detecting the irony in her tone, 'you wouldn't believe it at any price—the same with me at first. It seemed too good to be true. To think of me feeling lonely all these years for want of some one my own age to be company, and all the time a family growing up ready for me, if only I'd known it! It's funny when you come to look at it.'

'We haven't arrived at seeing the funny side of it yet,' observed Margot calmly; 'it is strange enough, certainly.'

'That's what I meant,' he explained, 'but I'm sure I've no call to quarrel with present arrangements. I'm as pleased as Punch, if you don't consider it a liberty of me to say so.'

He was more voluble than usual, in spite of his nervousness, for he could not repress the pride and satisfaction it gave him to be able to claim kinship with them, though he was awed at the same time by a sense of their immense superiority to himself. The younger Chevenings were remarkably good-looking, with the same air of race and distinction that gave such character to their elder sister's beauty. Between them and the undersized, insignificant-looking Allen a gulf of difference was fixed, which he could not fail to perceive.

Some natures would have felt this superiority only to hate its possessors with a rankling envy, but there was no trace of this in Allen's sentiments towards the Chevenings. He felt an almost awe-struck admiration for them already. Margot he had worshipped from the first in reverent humility, all unconscious, poor fellow, of the intensity of her repugnance to him. And now that he had seen the others—Ida, with her delicate face and clinging grace; Reggie, whose eyes had a look in them of Margot's; and Lettice, whose dainty childish loveliness was a new experience to him—he was willing to extend his allegiance in a scarcely less degree, anxious to convince them of the sincerity of his good will—so far as his somewhat restricted vocabulary would permit.

Unfortunately his past had left him with a manner which, when it was not uncouth, was instinctively obsequious in the presence of those in what he had been taught to regard as a higher station than his own.

Theoretically they were his equals now, but it cost him an effort to remember and act upon the knowledge, and, when he did, the only result was a familiarity which hardly rendered him more engaging.

On the other side, the first impressions were very far from favourable. Miss Henderson made up her mind privately at the first sight of him that it would not only be necessary, but desirable, to look out for another situation, and gave a side-glance of pity at Ida, who needed it at that moment. Ida's romantic imaginings of a dark, black-browed step-brother, who would be forbidding, but interesting in appearance, and would hate them all relentlessly—until he was disarmed by her own sweetness—were dispersed by the reality; but she was none the happier for that. On the contrary, the knowledge that the fate in store for them was of so commonplace, not to say vulgar, a kind was the bitterest drop in her cup. Reggie stood and stared, with his hands thrust deep in his pocket; how such a fellow as this could be by any possibility about to become their brother was more than he could understand. Why—he looked like a sort of shop-boy, only a little better dressed.

Lettice was the only one who seemed more reassured than dismayed. Allen's announcement to her the day before had not left any deep impression, and in the general disturbance of all her ideas she had not had time to connect the unknown step-brother with the person whose acquaintance she had made already; now that she recognised him, her worst fears fled.

'I didn't know the new brother was going to turn out to be *you* after all,' she remarked; 'you weren't in fun yesterday, then? *I* don't think you're a terrible person at all. Are you?'

'Not that I'm aware of,' said Allen; 'first time *I* ever heard of it, if I am.'

'I didn't think so,' pursued Lettice, 'because, when I hit you by accident with Yarrow's ball, you turned so very red and looked frightened—didn't you?'

'I—I can't say,' said Allen, in some confusion; 'I couldn't see myself, you know.'

‘Look in the glass now—you’re just the same. If you’re afraid of us,’ suggested Lettice, ‘hadn’t you better be somebody else’s brother, instead of ours? Because, really and truly, we’ve only just enough room for ourselves at home. It wouldn’t be at all comfortable for you.’

‘Don’t you trouble about me,’ said Allen, ‘I shall be right enough. And you won’t live where you are much longer. There’ll be lots of room.’

‘He is only teasing you, dear,’ said Margot, noticing the alarm returning to Lettice’s eyes; ‘don’t believe a word he says.’

‘Why,’ he protested, ‘it’s all true. I’m not joking; you *will* turn out of where you are!’

Lettice’s mouth was quivering. ‘Then Ida was right!’ she said; ‘you *are* going to turn us out—when you know we’ve always lived at home with mother all our lives! Oh, it is unkind of you! Why should you want us to—to sell matches and starve? We never did anything to you, any of us!’

Allen understood at last. ‘So that’s what you’ve got in your head, is it?’ he cried, with a noisy laugh; ‘that’s a good one and no mistake! Do you think anybody in their senses would want to turn the like of you out? Don’t you be alarmed about that. I’ll answer for it, father’ll only be too glad to have you about—why, he’ll think nothing too good for you; he won’t make any differences, bless you, he’s not that sort. What I meant by saying that you wouldn’t live where you are long, was only that you’d soon be coming to live along with me and father—that's all!'

'But, if you don't mind,' said Lettice, 'I think we would rather stay where we are—we're so used to our own house, you see. Margot, wouldn't you rather be at home?'

'We have not been consulted, Lettice,' said her elder sister, with a bitter little smile; 'everything has been settled without us. We must do as we are told!'

'*I* shan't, then,' interrupted Reggie, 'I shall just go on living where we are now. I'm sure his father won't have nearly such a nice house as ours is.'

'You wait till you see it!' said Allen. 'It's a splendid big house, with rooms you could put six of these into—regular first-class mansion, you know, glass-houses, with grapes and peaches growing, and conservatories, and a little stream running through the grounds where you can fish if you like—I tell you, it's something like a place, ours is!'

Lettice and Reggie were both impressed by this picture. 'Would there be room for Yarrow there?' inquired Lettice.

'Room for a dozen Yarrows!' said Allen. 'My governor's rich, you know; money's no consequence to him. Why, since I've been with him, I've only to ask him for whatever it is I want—and so it'll be with you, so long as you behave yourselves, of course. You just see if you aren't a precious sight better off with us than what you would if you went on as you are!'

In reality, this speech, though not remarkable for tact, was dictated by the desire to reconcile them all, and Margot particularly, to the future, and was perfectly free from any mere impulse of ostentation. But on Miss Chevening's fastidious and prejudiced ear it jarred as the coarse expression of ignorant purse-pride. That this contemptible boor should dare to patronise them, to think that any riches, any material comfort could be a recompense for the humiliation of being related to him! She said nothing—of what use was it to speak now?—but her foot beat the floor in her nervous irritation, and her beautiful haughty face grew more contemptuous, if possible, than before.

'It would be nice to have a big garden,' said Lettice, 'and I like peaches too. But I don't think I should like living in somebody else's house always—it would be like being on a visit, and never going away. Shall you be there all the time?'

This question was put with an intonation that left little room for a flattering construction. 'I shan't be in your way,' said Allen, feeling almost bound to apologise for being there at all. 'And long before that you'll have got used to the governor and me—see if you haven't!'

'It takes me a long time to get used to people, always,' said Lettice gravely; '*years*, sometimes.'

'Well,' he conceded, 'take your own time—don't hurry yourself.'

Lettice's dignity was easily offended. 'As if I was going to!' she exclaimed. 'You *can't* hurry with things like that; and I'm not sure that I ever shall get quite used to you. You see, you'll only be a Pretence Brother, and I've got Reggie, who's a real one, already!'

'Well,' said Allen, 'put up with me as well as you can, then, and I shan't complain.'

'If that will do,' said Lettice, 'I've begun to put up with you already, and of course you must put up with us too.'

He looked at her and the others with a rough admiration. 'That won't be much of a job,' he said, with the uncouth jocularity which was his only social equipment. 'I can do that on my head.'

A silence followed this short dialogue. Margot employed herself in studying a hideous glass disc containing an impossible view of Arundel Castle as if she had discovered in it a rare artistic merit. Ida and the governess, ignoring Allen, carried on a conversation in low tones; Reggie returned to his window, and Lettice to the drawing which had been interrupted. Allen was left stranded in the centre of the carpet, equally unable to take his departure and start the conversation afresh; he had an idea that it would somehow betray ignorance of polite society to address any remark to a governess, and, besides, he did not know what to say to her. He would have liked to talk to Margot about Trouville, but her manner was not encouraging just then, not even so encouraging as it used to be; he wondered why she had grown less cordial. He was just screwing up his courage to make an observation when there came the sweeping sound of a dress outside, and

Mrs. Chevening, smiling and yet with a visible anxiety in her eyes, appeared.

'So you have found your way up, dear Allen?' she said to him. 'And you all look quite at home together already. Children, I am bringing—Mr. Chadwick in to have a peep at you. Joshua, they are here—you can come up.'

Then a heavier footstep was heard ascending, and Chadwick entered.

'Darlings,' said their mother, 'here is somebody who is very anxious to be kind and good to you all, and I know you all mean to be good children, and make him proud of you.'

They came forward, one by one, to be presented, Chadwick seeming sensible—as well he might—of a certain awkwardness in the situation.

'So these are the chicks?' he said; 'come, we shan't be dull at Agra House, whatever else we are! Well, my dears, I hope we're going to be good friends. You've heard who I am by this time. Your mamma is kind enough to say she's going to be my wife, and so you're all coming to live comfortably with me, eh? Upon my word, Selina, they're a credit to you—they are indeed. I don't know when I've seen a finer looking lot—pick 'em anywhere you like! Allen, old fellow, what do you think of your new brother and sisters, eh? will they do?'

'Yes—thank'ee, father,' returned Allen, at a loss, as usual, for any more adequate words to express his feelings.

'Dear boy,' said Mrs. Chevening, 'you must come as often as you like while we are here—they will be so delighted to have you with them, and Margot is quite an old friend of yours, you know.'

'Ah, young lady, there you are, then?' said Chadwick; 'you kept so quiet, I didn't notice you. Come, haven't you a word for an old acquaintance? You're not looking as well as you did at Trouville. I never made out exactly why you ran away and left us all there. A pretty fright I had when I found you and your mother both gone, and left not so much as a card to say good-bye. Anxious about your sister, were you? that's right enough—not that there's much of the invalid about her now. Well, you didn't expect to see us turning up like this, I dare say?'

Margot forced herself to put her fingers in his hand and submit to his boisterous rallying. She wondered whether her mother winced under it, as she did; but no—Mrs. Chevening was smiling complacently, having apparently made up her mind to see no shortcomings in her future husband.

Chadwick, more to keep himself in countenance than with any more definite object, had been wandering round the table, where he came upon a sheet of paper covered with pencil drawings of a primitive order of art.

'What have we got here?' he said; 'who's the artist?'

'Lettice, I suspect,' said her mother.

'Is it you, missie? Come here and tell us what it's all about.'

‘I—I don’t like to, quite,’ said Lettice shyly, who had a habit of solacing herself in calamity by inventing pictures appropriate to the particular situation.

‘Don’t be silly, darling,’ said Mrs. Chevening; ‘do what you are asked to do—at once!’

‘It’s only a story,’ explained Lettice at last; ‘those are the pictures for it—only you’re holding them upside down.’

‘Oh, this way up, with care, eh? Well, who’s this in a straw hat jumping with an umbrella in her hand—Mrs. Jim Crow?’

‘It isn’t a straw hat,’ said Lettice, forgetting everything else in the reflection on her powers of portrayal, ‘it’s a halo—she’s a kind of saint, you know, like those in the Old Masters, and it isn’t an umbrella in her hand exactly, but something of the same kind. She’s protecting a poor little girl (that’s the little girl in the corner) because her mamma married again, and so she was turned out of the house.’

‘Lettice, you mustn’t tease Mr. Chadwick!’ interrupted her mother hastily; ‘children have such absurd fancies, Joshua, but they don’t mean anything by them.’

‘Let’s have this out,’ said Chadwick, roughly but not unkindly; ‘so you’ve been thinking that little girls whose mammas marry again always get turned out as a regular thing, eh? You won’t want that saint yet awhile—tell her to wait till you’re a naughty little girl and deserve turning out. Then she can bring on her umbrella!’

‘I’m sure to be naughty *some* day,’ said Lettice, whom experience had made fatalistic in this respect; 'a *little* naughty, you know.'

'Well, you'll have to be very naughty indeed before you're turned out, and then I shall think twice about it. I've been turned out myself once, and I know what it's like!'

He patted her head as he spoke, and Lettice, though she winced a little under his heavy hand, felt that she need not think seriously about dying on a doorstep just yet.

'Well,' said Chadwick, who could not be accused of excess of sentiment, 'they'll be doing that beefsteak to a cinder, Allen, my boy, if we are not back at the hotel soon! Good-bye, my darl—h'm—my dears! See you again soon!'

When the girls were alone again, there was a cautious silence, broken by Margot:

'Did I exaggerate much?' she demanded; 'isn't our future brother a fascinating person? how proud we shall be to be seen with him!'

'Margot,' asked Lettice, 'would you call him a gentleman?'

'If I called him a Greek god, dear,' said Margot, 'that wouldn't make him one. Why?'

'I was only thinking,' said Lettice, whose thoughts were apt to take an involved form. 'There are some gentlemen who *are* gentlemen who *aren't* gentlemen—and there are other gentlemen who *aren't* gentlemen who *are* gentlemen—which should you say he was, Margot?'

‘I’m not clever enough to tell you, darling. And now you and Reggie must go and get ready for dinner—off with you, quick!’

When they were gone, Ida said, with a tragic little groan, ‘It really is too awful, Margot! Hennie, don’t you pity us all?’

‘I do indeed, dearest—only you know I can’t very well say so!’

‘No, you poor darling! Oh, if only they will leave us you—you *will* try not to be sent away, Hennie, won’t you—you won’t desert us?’

Miss Henderson had been reconsidering her idea of seeking another engagement. These Chadwicks were clearly rich—she might even gain an increase in salary by remaining; she really was attached to Ida in her way, and her accomplishments were not so varied as to make it easy for her, in these days of competition, to find immediate employment without difficulty. She had decided, therefore, to use her best efforts to remain. Even if Mrs. Chevening, as was not unlikely, should be not unwilling to get rid of her, there were those arrears of salary which she might find it inconvenient to pay off all at once; and the governess had a shrewd suspicion that her employer would not disclose to her future husband more of her embarrassments than was absolutely necessary.

So she replied with much fervour that she would stand by her beloved Ida till cruel necessity forced her away; she hoped, she prayed, that when all her past services were remembered, no one would have the heart to send her adrift on the world—not even such people as the Chadwicks seemed to be.

'Do you think mother really will marry that man?' Ida asked Margot; 'she *might* change her mind—even at the last moment. Can't we do anything to show her how we hate it? He might give it up if he knew!'

'Do you think I haven't done all I could?' cried Margot; 'she says she is doing it for our sakes. For our sakes!' she repeated, with a sense of the irony of the words. 'But I am quite sure of this: she means to do it, and nothing in the world we can do or say will prevent her. We are quite helpless, you see. If we show *them* what we feel about it, we shall only look ridiculous. Why,' she continued with deep indignation, 'mother even said just now that if I chose to oppose her openly, she would send me away—away from you all . . . She said she would have no other course.'

'Oh, Margot!' exclaimed Ida.

'You see what the danger is—we *must* put a good face on it. We needn't be hypocrites, of course, but if we're all to keep together, we must be prudent. We need only be civil to—to him, and if mother forces his horrid son upon us, well, we must bear it as well as we can. Fortunately,' added Margot, 'I think I taught him at Trouville not to expect too much.'

'How hateful he was, with his boasts about his father's money and house and all the rest of it!' exclaimed Ida.

'That is the sort of conversation we shall have to get used to,' said Margot; 'we shall be constantly reminded how much better off we are, and how thankful we ought to be. As if our dear old shabby house at Chiswick, where we knew only people we cared about, and did just as we pleased, was not all the home we ever wanted!'

'And yet we always used to be grumbling at it, didn't we?' said Ida, rendered ungrammatical by remorse; 'I know *I* was. Like the silly fir-tree in Hans Andersen, that never knew when it was well off. But must we really try to like that awful boy, Margot?'

'*Like* him—no!' said Miss Chevening, 'who can like a thing like that? I detest him, and I always shall. But what is the use of showing it? you have to be very rude before you make any impression on that sort of person—I gave up the attempt long ago. We will take no more notice of him than we can possibly help, but I am afraid we shall have to take some.'

'After all,' said Miss Henderson, 'there are plenty of ways of keeping people at a distance without giving them any cause to complain.'

'That's how we will treat him!' cried Ida gleefully; 'you shall teach me, Hennie.'

And while these tactics were being discussed, the unconscious enemy was walking over the green in dazed delight at his own good fortune in being admitted into such a family, and thinking of the pleasure he would feel in introducing Margot to the glories of Agra House.

After all, it is not amiss to be dull of perception sometimes.

CHAPTER III

TO DEAF EARS

Not much need be said of the time which was spent by the Chevenings and the two Chadwicks at Littlehampton. For Margot, they were days of acute humiliation; she felt as if they were all being led captives at the chariot wheels of some Barbarian Conqueror. She could no longer, as at Trouville, look forward to approaching release; she was no longer free even to give full utterance to her thoughts; at things which had once moved her scorn she had now to blush as one directly concerned, and all her pride rebelled against the necessity which laid such a yoke as this upon her.

It was exaggerated feeling on her part, a prejudice she had wilfully fomented in her own mind; even Margot would have admitted that there was nothing in itself degrading or derogatory in an alliance with a wealthy ex-indigo-planter. It is true that Chadwick's early training, and the exceptionally unfriended life—thanks to his own choice and conduct—he had led in Bengal, had not tended to invest him with even the average amount of social polish. But, though coarse in grain and with a nature warped by a series of misfortunes, he was not, after all, aggressively vulgar in appearance; he was passable enough, and, so far, had shown every sign of being kindly disposed to those who were about to be dependent upon him. Still, Margot could not pardon her mother in her heart for descending to such a union as this. She would have found it difficult to reconcile herself to any second marriage her mother might make; but, in this case, her disapproval was aggravated by the intense, the unreasonably intense, dislike she had conceived for the innocent Allen. She was compelled, as far as possible, to abstain from expressing it openly, but in secret made no attempt to overcome it. On the contrary, she deliberately indulged it, storing up every jarring speech, every vulgar trick of voice and manner, as food to keep her resentment alive. She did not avoid his society at most times, and even humoured his halting efforts to entertain her, as if with a perverse determination to spare herself nothing.

Allen was again in the seventh heaven; she treated him once more as in those happy days at Trouville, listened while he talked to her, and made replies in which he at least failed to detect any covert irony. Then her sisters were with her now, and with them she would be sweet and natural, and gay sometimes, when she forgot, and he imagined, mistakenly enough, that he had some share in this intimacy, and was gladder at heart. Ah! if she would be really a sister to him, he told himself that he would ask no more, for was not that more than he had any claim to expect?—though even then he knew very well that a feeling was growing up within him, which he was afraid to define to himself, and which he already had a foreboding would not end in happiness. Yet he did not strangle this hopeless passion of his when he might have done, but glozed it over with another name, as many a wiser and better educated person has done before him.

He did all in his power to propitiate the younger members of the family, but, except in the case of Reggie, his efforts were not as yet very successful, and Reggie's adherence was due to a discovery that this queer new brother had plenty of pocket-money, and could be induced to spend it on sweetstuff for his benefit by a few judicious hints. He had it all to himself, too, for Lettice declined to accept any, even from her brother. Her rejection of all Allen's advances gave him a sore heart now and then, for he felt strongly drawn to Lettice, with her quaint dignity and frank, fearless ways; he would willingly have been friends with her, if she had consented. But Lettice's affections were not to be bought, and the example set her by her elders served to counteract any friendliness she might otherwise have extended to him.

For Ida Allen cared less; she took less pains to control her tongue; he did arrive sometimes at suspecting her of deliberately intending to be disagreeable. She was affected, too, and querulous, and, pretty as she was, he felt less desire to conciliate her than any of the others; in fact, something very like the foundation of a grudge against her was laid in him during those last few days at Littlehampton.

The time was spent mostly in expeditions to various local places of interest; to Arundel, and Chichester, and Worthing, and others; expeditions of which Chadwick, as at Trouville, assumed the entire command. He had not seen them since he was a boy, he declared, and he insisted that they should all see them together, though Margot, at least, chafed at going sightseeing in this *bourgeois* fashion. It had seemed wearisome enough in Normandy, but now she was directly involved and could no longer maintain her attitude of unconcerned superiority.

To a high-spirited, intensely proud girl as she was, exclusive and fastidious by nature, and regarding the commonplace with youthful intolerance, her position was genuinely trying, though not so hard, it must be owned, as she chose to consider it. She was miserable; she had often felt before that she was deprived of opportunities which other girls enjoyed, which she too had once confidently looked forward to; but, if existence in the unfashionable old house by the river, with few friends and little gaiety, had been dull, it was never ignoble—there was a dignity in it, in spite of their limited means and money troubles (of which she had preferred to remain in contented ignorance), which had comforted her at her lowest. Now that was all over; there could be no poetry henceforth for her in this new atmosphere of vulgar well-being. Condemned to be constantly with those who were utterly out of sympathy with her, she felt for ever shut out from congenial society—for she could not imagine that any 'nice' people would care to visit at her step-father's. Had he not enlarged sometimes on the unfriendliness of his country neighbours? She did not wonder at it; and of course they would be under the ban too.

Mrs. Chevening's equanimity did not seem to be disturbed by any doubts as to the wisdom of the step she was taking. She had taken it rather sooner than she had intended, for the shock of her supposed departure from Trouville had brought Chadwick's feelings to a climax; still she had long seen that, if she was to extricate herself from her growing difficulties, she must either marry her daughter well, or marry again herself. She had made careful inquiries into Chadwick's position, and at one time she had allowed herself to speculate on the possibility of marrying Margot to his only son. But when Allen appeared on the scene, even Mrs. Chevening saw that this scheme must be abandoned. Margot proved impracticable, and her mother was clever enough to see that she was powerless here. His father, meanwhile, was showing unmistakable signs of desiring something more than friendship; he did not pretend to be in love, but he spoke more and more often of his big empty house, and the need he felt of a wife who would help him to gain a footing in the county. He was not alarmed by the fact of so many step-children—there was enough for all. Mrs. Chevening was tired of her fallen fortunes, of the constant and increasing battle between expenses and income; she wanted to see her brilliant Margot enjoying her rightful opportunities of marrying well; there were her other daughters to be considered, her son to be educated. As the wife of a wealthy ex-indigo-planter, she felt very certain of ensuring all these advantages; he was not over-refined, but she could school him where it was necessary, and keep him as much in the background as possible; the only social bar lay in what his father had been, and that could be got over now.

And so Mrs. Chevening soon persuaded herself that it was the only thing to do, and that, for her children's sake, she ought to accept the offer, which was made in a peremptory 'take it or leave it' style that demanded an instant decision.

Accordingly, with some graceful phrases about giving her orphaned children a father, and supplying herself the place of a mother to 'poor Allen,' she had consented, with a private reflection that, should it turn out that she had been misinformed in any essential respects, she could always withdraw in time.

She had dreaded having to break the news to her family—above all to Margot, with whom she knew she must employ all her firmness before she could compel her to any sort of acquiescence. However, that was over, and really, as far as she could tell, the girls seemed wonderfully reconciled to it already, and by careful management, she kept their dislike to Allen from appearing too plainly. 'They really seemed quite attached to dear Allen,' she would tell his father; 'he was a constant companion in all their walks; she was so pleased to see the shyness melting away, but of course Margot had given him a good character, and they felt as if they had known him ever so long; he seemed so happy to be with them, too—it was quite ideal altogether!'

Chadwick saw nothing, believed, and was well satisfied. He felt that he had done an uncommonly good stroke of business. He was going to marry a widow, who was still handsome and beyond question a lady. With her and her beautiful daughters to form the attraction at Agra House, he need not complain of isolation any longer, the county society would soon rally round him. And for Allen, too, the companionship of lively pretty girls would be a capital thing; it would teach him certain things which his father was beginning dimly to see he needed to be taught. Yes, his first marriage had been a mistake, he saw that now, and he had had to pay for it with over twenty years' exile and hardship; his second marriage was going to be a success.

Such, so far, were the various attitudes of the persons interested. It should be mentioned here that one humble member of the Chevening family extended to Allen a friendship which had nothing in it of reserve or self-interest, and that was the dog Yarrow. For some inscrutable reason, the collie received him at once into unhesitating favour, beaming on him with liquid golden-tawny eyes, presenting him handsomely with his honest paw and pushing his panting head under Allen's arm at every possible opportunity. For this he was lectured in private by Lettice, who considered it almost in the light of a desertion to the enemy; and even Margot, to whom he nominally belonged, was not above feeling a secret chagrin—although she did not deign openly to notice this exhibition of bad taste on Yarrow's part.

Allen did not know much about dogs, and had never owned one in his life, but he was grateful to the collie for his preference—it seemed to him a good omen that Margot's dog should be fond of him.

When this constant companionship with the Chevening girls came to an end, as it did in a very few days, on their departure for London, he felt almost as bereaved as on that miserable afternoon at Trouville when he learned that Margot had gone. But things were not nearly so bad now; he would see them still occasionally at Chiswick during the winter, and early in the year they were all coming to live at Agra House (so christened by his grandfather, in defiant commemoration of the business which had enriched him)—that was something to be patient for. The weeks that followed were rather dull for him; his father was absent in town for the greater part of the time, and Allen lived at his new home with no other companion than the grim relative who had brought him up, and whom Chadwick had established there as temporary caretaker. Allen naturally had no experience of shooting or hunting; the man who looked after the stables gave him a few riding lessons now and then, but Allen showed no particular aptitude for horsemanship, and the groom was rather ashamed of going out with him. 'He do sit loose, that young chap—as loose as anyone I ever see on top of a horse,' he would remark in the village; 'now the guv'nor, any one 'ud tell *he's* been in the saddle a bit, not that I call *him* a rider—but that young Allen, blest if I think he knows a horse 'as a mouth at all!'

He was not more successful at shooting; he knew none of the residents and the Agra House grounds had no cover to speak of, so the sport was confined to missing an occasional rabbit. And his aunt, though she treated him with an increase of respect, as became his altered fortunes, was not cheerful society, especially when she approached the subject of her brother-in-law's second marriage.

'What he wants to marry *for* at his age, *I* don't know!' she would often remark, as they sat in the big dining-room, with the 'handsome' furniture, dull-toned paper, and immense gaselier, which the late Mr. Chadwick had insisted upon. 'I'd have looked after everything for him, if that was all. But no—he's not content with that, he must be marrying the first woman who chooses to set her cap at him—a widow, they tell me. Any family, has she got?' she inquired once.

'Four,' Allen answered, with a secret thrill; 'one grown-up—a young lady, you know.'

'Ah! a worldly widow with a family,' his aunt commented. 'Well, I don't know what your poor mother would have said to it, I'm sure, if she could see such doings. But there, it's no use my saying anything—though I'm sorry for you, that I am!'

'You needn't be, aunt,' was Allen's ordinary reply to this; 'I'm glad.'

'Glad, are you? Then, Allen Chadwick, you're a bigger fool than I took you for; but there, you'll find your mistake out some day!'

And Miss Wrigley would go on with her knitting with a highly expressive snort. In her narrow way she had done her duty by her nephew, and though he had not been as steady as she wished him to be, and was not as bright and smart as some of her neighbours' lads, she had a certain grim affection for him, which showed itself in a touch of sharpness sometimes at his apparent inability to take his own part and look after his interests.

'He's like his mother in that,' she would think; 'she'd have let anyone cut the head off her shoulders if they asked her!'

While Allen was longing for the weeks to pass, and the day to come which would make him a member of Margot's family, she was grudging every hour that brought her nearer to the time. More than any of the others, she clung to the picturesque old-fashioned house by the river where they had spent the last few years. It was dingy and dark from the creepers that overgrew the front, and the scraggy truncated elms that almost brushed the great bow-window with their branches. The river, now leaden and mist-shrouded, glided by on the other side of the narrow road. At night she heard the water lap and wash against the bank under her window, and wondered how she could ever have thought the sound a dismal one. Melancholy it might be, but, now that she had little cause to be joyous, the river seemed a soothing and unobtrusive sharer in her sorrow—she liked to fancy that it was a little sorry to lose them all.

And the house, so cool and fresh in summer, so snug and comfortable in winter, with such refinement and harmony in its faded tones and old furniture; the house, with its memories of happy dreaming hours spent on summer afternoons in the balcony over the porch, of merry family romps, when her dignity as growing school-girl or 'finished' young lady was thrown to the winds; the very walls, associated with so many simple little festivals—how dear they had all become! She had never known till then how much it would cost her to leave all this; and they were to leave it for what? For a country house, built the day before yesterday, by a retired tradesman—for the elder Chadwick was nothing more; a poor exchange enough, even could they have been permitted to occupy it alone; but when she thought whose house it would be, and the position they would fill in it, her heart swelled with indignation against her mother.

When Lady Yaverland heard of the step her younger sister was contemplating, she did what she had not found time to do for some years—she drove down to Chiswick in state from Portman Square; and it being impossible to drive up to the house, from the fact that the road along the bank was a mere footpath at that particular spot, her carriage was to be seen waiting in a back road, the nearest point of approach, with the coachman wearing an expression which seemed to disown all personal responsibility for being found in such a neighbourhood, while a fur-caped footman stood majestically by the railings in front of the shabby old ivy-grown house. Lady Yaverland had brought her youngest daughter, Valeria, with her, and, at a suggestion from her mother, Margot took her cousin off to her own room. The two girls had never been intimate; the Honourable Miss Valeria Brading, who, if patrician, was undeniably plain in appearance, was inclined to resent her cousin's beauty, and patronised her when they met in a highly provoking manner. 'Do tell me all about it,' she began, as she sank down in Margot's easy-chair. 'I am *so* interested. When is Aunt Selina going to marry? Aren't you awfully delighted?'

'Mother is going to marry early next year, Valeria,' said Margot. 'And I'm *not* awfully delighted. I think it's dreadful!'

'You *very* curious person!' said Miss Brading languidly; 'why, I should have thought it was the best thing that could happen for all of you. Won't you be fearfully well off now? I thought he was so rich and all that?'

'What are his riches to us?' said Margot. 'Do you think one can't be happy without that?'

'I should certainly have thought,' said Miss Valeria, with a glance round the room, in the appointments of which taste was more conspicuous than luxury, 'that you would like to see more of the world than you can possibly do in a place like this. I dare say you will live in town for the season now, and go out, and all that sort of thing. You'll enjoy it, because it will all be fresh to you. It isn't as if you had grown up in it as I have!'

'I don't know where we shall live—in the country, most likely, all the year,' said Margot—'but I know I shall not enjoy anything, wherever we are. I should hate myself if I thought I could!'

'That's so silly, dear,' remarked her cousin, in a superior tone, which was undeniably infuriating; '*we* think it quite a nice arrangement in every way.'

'Very likely,' said Miss Chevening warmly; 'it must be pleasanter to have rich relations than poor ones, however little you see of them. Never mind, Valeria, we will agree that we ought to consider ourselves very fortunate—only we are so stupid that we don't. And now let's talk of something else.'

'Indeed I've no wish to pursue the subject; only I must say that, if you will bury yourselves away in a place like this, it is rather too much to complain of people not coming to see you—it is really.'

'Is it, Valeria?' said Margot; 'if I did complain, I won't do it again. Come into the schoolroom and see Ida and Lettice, they'll be so glad.'

Lady Yaverland took her leave in a most cordial manner. 'Good-bye, Selina, dearest,' she said, as she rose; 'we shall hope to see more of you in the future.

I really am more enchanted than I can say. Now do bring Mr. Chadwick to see me some day—let me see, shall it be next Wednesday?—no, I've got something on Wednesday, I *know*. Thursday, then? or stop, there are people coming to lunch on Thursday—we shan't get a moment together. Valeria, are we free on Friday, darling?—oh, that tiresome afternoon concert at the Brutons'! Well, I must write and fix a day, and, in any case, you will be sure to let me know when and where the ceremony is to take place—I shall make a point of being there. Roberts, tell Jennings the carriage, please.'

So Lady Yaverland and her daughter walked back to their smart carriage, which was presently rolling away along the bankside, past the baring trees and decaying houses. Lady Yaverland was really pleased. She had married a wealthy manufacturer, who, for some services he had rendered his party, had been raised to the peerage as Baron Yaverland some years ago. After her husband had received this distinction, she had taken a position in society which did not allow her to see much of her sister, especially when Mrs. Chevening had become a widow, and was forced by her own imprudent speculations to withdraw beyond the radius recognised by Society and its coachmen.

She had felt some twinges of conscience, nevertheless, and was always on the point of seeing whether something could not be done for 'poor dear Selina,' consoling herself for doing nothing by the reflection that living must be very cheap at Chiswick, and if

Selina was really in any difficulties she would write and ask for assistance. Now that Selina was actually going to make a really sensible marriage, Lady Yaverland's heart naturally warmed to her; she could be cordial now with impunity—and hence her visit.

'*Dear* Selina!' she said to her daughter, as they drove away, 'she seems so contented and satisfied, spoke so nicely of him, I was quite pleased to hear her. She'll have everything she can want now, and those poor girls will be provided for after all. I must send her something really nice for a wedding present. You must help me to choose. Margot very delighted about it all, I suppose?'

'I shouldn't say she was enthusiastic exactly,' drawled Miss Valeria. 'I gathered that she rather disapproved of it.'

'Foolish girl!' said her mother; 'however, she will have to resign herself to the inevitable.'

Mrs. Chevening stood at the window smiling and kissing her hand while her sister in her heavy furs was stepping daintily along the narrow path. 'Good-bye, good-bye, dearest ones, come again soon!' she was saying, rather to govern her expression than with any hope of being audible. '*What* a pity it is for that poor girl to be so plain! And Gwendolen looks quite twenty years older than when I saw her last. However, I am very glad she came. You see now, Margot, that my own sister doesn't consider I have lost caste, whatever my daughter chooses to think!'

'When you bring Mr. Chadwick to see Aunt Gwendolen, mother,' said Margot, 'shall you take Allen too?'

'I see no necessity for it,' replied her mother; 'he is hardly fit to go into society at present, poor fellow!'

'No,' said Margot, 'but you consider him quite fit for our society, don't you, mother?'

'I thought,' said her mother, 'that I was not to have the pain of hearing such language as this from you again, Margot!'

'Mother!' said the girl passionately, 'I can't always keep silence—you must let me speak out sometimes, when we are alone. I do try to treat Mr. Chadwick as you would wish. I—I am even getting not to mind him. But Allen—mother, you can't expect me to feel that he is the sort of person I can bear to think of as a constant companion—as a brother! I know you believe you are doing the best for us all—perhaps you are, for the others—but at least you might understand that I can't help being a little bitter now and then—just on my own account!'

She stood there, tall and slender, with a look of unconquerable pride on her fair face, and yet her voice had something winning and appealing in it which caused her mother a momentary pang of self-reproach. Mrs. Chevening thought of her future step-son and placed him mentally by the side of this girl; the effect was grotesque enough to arouse a certain sympathy with her daughter's protest.

'Well, well, my dear,' she said, with a little sigh, 'I don't ask you to feel what perhaps it is not natural that you should feel. I am quite sure that you will see one day that I am right in the course I am taking; and if Allen is the chief objection, Margot,' she added, 'be patient, dearest, a little while. Young men are not generally great stay-at-homes!'

CHAPTER IV

THE DANGERS OF NOT KNOWING WHEN TO STOP

It was some time before Lady Yaverland found leisure to fix a day for making the acquaintance of her sister's husband-elect, but she did so at last, and even sent an invitation to dinner. 'It had better be dinner, George,' she had said to her husband; 'I don't want poor Selina to feel herself abandoned, and we need not see anything of them afterwards, you know. And if we don't have them now, we shall have to ask them down to Arreton later!'

'It was a very quiet little dinner—"only just ourselves,"' as Lady Yaverland had explained; even the daughters of the house were not present, and their absence was not accounted for. Perhaps the dinner did not promise to establish any very cordial relations for the future between the principal persons concerned. Chadwick had seen enough of the world not to feel intimidated by the presence of a peer, but he took rather more pains to make this evident than he need have done. In fact, he talked down and contradicted his host so persistently that Lord Yaverland, though the mildest and least exacting of noblemen, became a little restive at last, and his wife deemed it necessary to rebuke the offender. 'Perhaps you don't know, Mr. Chadwick—and if so I may tell you,' she said, with an ambiguous blandness, 'that the indigo question, and, in fact, Indian affairs generally, have been a special study of Lord Yaverland's for some *years*!'

'Can't help that, my lady,' said Chadwick. 'Of course, if his lordship tells me he's *been* there, that's another thing!'

'It has always been a dream of mine,' said the host, 'to visit a country in which I take considerable interest, but, as a matter of fact——'

'You haven't got beyond dreaming at present?' interrupted Chadwick, with his loud laugh. 'That's where it is, you see! Not that you'd know much more about it if you went; they'd show you round, and tell you just as much as they wanted you to know, and, after six weeks of that sort of thing, you'd come back and write an article in a crack magazine, or a book very likely, and think you had settled the whole question. Now I've *been* out there, lived there over twenty years, and I know what *I'm* talking about, and I tell you, you may take it from *me*——'

'Forgive me,' said Lord Yaverland stiffly, 'there are some things I really cannot consent to take from anybody. Selina, was Trouville at all crowded this season?'

Mrs. Chevening saw of course that her future husband was not producing the best of impressions, but she accepted it philosophically enough. She did not care very much whether her sister and she were to be intimate in future or not; their paths had always lain too much apart to make that a very likely contingency; and now, though she was willing that Chadwick should understand that if she was poor she was no adventuress, she did not expect this meeting to lead to anything. Even Chadwick's breaches of the ordinary amenities of life did not cause her any acute distress—he was 'like that,' and it was of no use minding; but she was glad that Margot, who had been included in the invitation, had declined to accompany her—she would not have liked to see the expression she knew her daughter's face would have worn.

When the two sisters were alone together in the great drawing-room, Lady Yaverland began with a little hesitation: 'I hope, Selina,' she said, 'I hope you are quite—*quite* sure that this is a—a wise thing you are going to do?'

'Really, Gwendolen,' retorted Mrs. Chevening, with a rather accelerated beat of her fan, 'I think I may be considered old enough to manage my own affairs. I have been left to manage them for myself all these years!'

'And a dreadful muddle you have made of them!' came into Lady Yaverland's mind, but all she said was, 'You mustn't be angry with me, Selina; I can't help asking, because—because—well, it is so *very* unlike anything I should have expected you to do!'

'It is all very well, Gwendolen,' said Mrs. Chevening; 'I don't pretend that I should have done quite this, if I hadn't been so horribly poor. But what was I to do? You know *you* wouldn't have helped me!'

'It is unkind of you to say that,' interposed Lady Yaverland, who felt this thrust to come unpleasantly near home. 'You never asked me—though' (this was due to a recollection that her purse might still be not out of danger) 'I assure you I have so many claims upon me that I often don't know where to turn for money myself. However, it is different for you now—you will not be horribly poor any longer at all events!'

'No, I suppose not. And really he is very good!'

'I don't doubt it for a moment, and of course, as you say, you are the best judge; I dare say you will be very happy.'

In parting Chadwick gave his host and hostess a pressing invitation to visit them at his place at Gorsecombe after the marriage. 'Always pleased to see any of Selina's family, my lord,' he assured him; 'just drop us a line a day or two before to say we're to expect you, and you may depend upon us to let you know if it's inconvenient—run down when you can, and no ceremony.'

To which Lady Yaverland had replied somewhat frostily for herself and her husband, that 'Mr. Chadwick was too kind—but they so seldom paid any visits now.'

'An offensive fellow, Gwen!' Lord Yaverland remarked, when his guests were gone; 'don't know when I've seen a more offensive fellow. What on earth possessed Selina to take up with him?'

'Poor dear Selina!' said his wife, 'she has her girls to think of. He's very well off, I understand. I'm afraid we can't know them, though.'

'I couldn't stand him at Arreton, I know that. Selina must come alone if she comes at all.'

'She won't expect it; she is very sensible about some things. We have done our duty, at least; we can run up for the wedding, you know—I'm afraid you've had a boring evening, George?'

'Well, my dear, I did find him a trifle fatiguing.'

'Think what it will be for poor Selina!'

'That's *her* look-out!' said Lord Yaverland, as he retired to his library. At about the same time Chadwick, as he escorted Mrs. Chevening home, was reviewing the evening with complacency.

'I think, Selina,' he was saying, 'I gave his lordship a wrinkle or two' (a surmise which was more literally correct than he imagined). 'I tackled him about India—did you hear me? I always get my monkey up when I hear these swells laying down the law about indigo, when all the time they don't know the difference between a ryot and a gantidar! Still, I hope I was civil, eh?'

'I think, if anything, you were almost too—too respectful in some ways,' hazarded Mrs. Chevening. 'George isn't accustomed to be called "my lord" quite so often.'

'Why, I threw it in from time to time, just to show I remembered the difference in rank between us,' cried Chadwick. 'God bless my soul, Selina, do you suppose I don't know how to behave—even if I *have* lived amongst niggers all my life? You seem to think I'm an ignorant boor by the way you talk, hanged if you don't!'

'Indeed, Joshua, I never thought any such thing!' protested Mrs. Chevening, who saw that his pride was seriously ruffled, 'and I'm sure George was very much struck by all you said—I thought you were *so* right about things.'

'Right? I should think I *was* right!' said Chadwick, mollified at once; 'he knocked under completely after you went. I've taken rather a fancy to him, I must say, and your sister seems a pleasant woman—stiffer than *I* care about—but pleasant.'

'Gwendolen *can* be very pleasant,' said her sister.

'Well,' said Chadwick, 'I can't trot out any lords on *my* side of the family, Selina, but perhaps we're none the worse for that. Not that I've any objection to lords as such, but I don't run after 'em, and I'm in no hurry for them to run after *me*!'

'I scarcely think you are likely to suffer any annoyance of that kind,' Mrs. Chevening could not help retorting; to which he replied, in all sincerity, that he 'did not advise any lord to try it on.'

Christmas approached, the last they were all to spend at Osier House, which fact alone would have been enough to spoil the day in anticipation for Margot, even if the party at the dinner-table were not to be joined by Allen and his father. Chadwick had engaged quarters for Christmas at a hotel in Chiswick, and it was arranged that Allen should come up and share them. He was almost as much at the house as his father, and it fell to the girls' lot to entertain him, which they found as irksome a task as ever. Margot had schooled herself once more to behave to him with a kind of severe tolerance, and, as usual, he accepted this as a symptom of growing friendliness, and responded with what disdainful Margot chose to consider odious familiarity—though, could she have known it, there was nothing but the purest respect and admiration in his feelings for her.

However, she could not, or would not, see it, and escaped from the infliction of his company as often as she could, sometimes soothing her irritation by lonely walks along the quaint old-world streets and alleys by the riverside between Hammersmith and Kew bridges; for Margot preferred, when in these moods, to walk alone.

She had gone out one afternoon a day or two before Christmas, and followed the road which, after striking inland to save a curve of the bank, returns again to the river through one of the most picturesque of old suburban streets.

How she loved it now—this irregular winding thoroughfare of old brick houses, with projecting corbelled roofs, whose white-sashed windows must have seen Hogarth's sturdy figure pass and repass many a time! The little shops were bright with Christmas cheer ; in the greengrocer's window stood the little figure of Father Christmas, which had made its annual reappearance there every year she had been in Chiswick —it would come out again next year, no doubt, but she would not be there to see. The grim old mansions further on showed a glimpse of warmth and firelight through the tall windows, and here, at the end of the lane, was the church, and through a gap the river showed a dull lead-colour, with oily eddies and flaws on its swollen surface, and the faint outlines of trees on the opposite bank ; a tug with a trail of barges in its wake came panting and puffing down, as if protesting against overwork. It was still light, the day had been mild for the season, and the rain had not long cleared ; Margot walked on, unwilling to turn back just then, her whole thoughts absorbed in self-pity. She had left the river again, had passed a timber-yard, where a log was screaming like a hurt animal under the whirr of the steam-saw, and now she had come to a quiet old terrace, which, reserving its best side for the river, presents the anomalous appearance of having all its front doors at the back. At the end of this row of quaint diminutive pillared porches and irregularly placed windows, she had resolved to turn, but, before she reached it, some one came towards her from the narrow lane in front, and, with a curious mixture of feeling, she saw that it was Nugent Orme.

Orme, of course, had been at least as quick in recognising her, in spite of the failing light and the partial disguise of her winter wraps. People who had once known Miss Chevening were not apt to pass her by, and, as it chanced, he was thinking of her at that very moment. To tell the truth, this was not the first time he had taken this walk of late, and with a faint undefined expectation of some such encounter as this, though hitherto only to experience the puzzling fact that the last place, as a rule, to find people one is anxious to meet, is the neighbourhood where they happen to dwell.

This time he had a definite reason for turning his steps in that direction, as he had to see somebody at Chiswick, though he had set out to walk there by the longer way along the river bank, less with any real hope of seeing Miss Chevening than to please his fancy once more with the endeavour to identify her house among the many comfortable old houses by the riverside with the trees darkening their verandahed fronts.

From this it will be perceived that the impression Miss Chevening had left on him was deeper after all than he had been disposed to believe at the time. He was constantly making efforts to call up her features and expression exactly; sometimes with a tantalising flash of success, generally with results distressing by their vagueness. He speculated about her a good deal, too, going back often in fancy to that delicious scene of reconciliation on his last night, and trying to penetrate her motives. If only he could be quite sure she was as anxious to keep his friendship as she seemed—if only she was as frank and unaffected as he had believed at the time—if she had not been practising on him for some reason or other! All this did not affect either his rest or his appetite, but it gave his leisure thoughts an interest, a pervading romance and sentiment which had not begun to fade as yet.

Now he saw her again, and instantly felt how faithlessly and inadequately his memory had served him—the reality was so far more charming, there was so much that he had unaccountably forgotten! That blending in her of the imperious young goddess and the wilful child, for instance, had escaped him utterly till he saw her now. She smiled at him as she held out her hand; her eyes were kind, though her mouth was a little tremulous, and she looked less buoyant and less happy than he remembered her; she had not forgotten him, but he fancied she was not altogether glad to see him just then.

'Is this one of your haunts?' she inquired, as they stood there.

He explained, without thinking it necessary to mention that it was not his first visit, that he had to call at a Chiswick hotel on business of his father's.

'Do you know that you have chosen the most roundabout way to get there?'

'Have I really?' he said hypocritically; 'however, it is too late to alter that now.'

'You *might* reach the main road from here if you are pressed for time, but it is much the uglier way certainly. I was just turning back, so, if you like, we might walk together part of the way, and I could put you in the right road.'

Miss Chevening did not know, and I am afraid did not greatly care, how far she was warranted by the proprieties in making this offer. At first, the pain of meeting him had outweighed the pleasure, and her impulse had been to pass on after a few commonplace words, and go back by a different way. But when she saw the very evident pleasure in his eyes, she had not the heart for this—it would be pleasant after all to talk with him again, even though it was all so changed now.

How gratefully and gladly he accepted need not be said. He had found her again, more kind and more beautiful than ever; he was walking by her side, and she was talking to him with the old sweet brusqueness, and a delicate note of sadness in her voice sometimes that endeared her more to him than any gaiety.

‘It seems years ago since the Trouville days,’ she said, and added: ‘I mean so many things have happened since—to me at least.’ She was wondering—half hopefully—if he had heard; she was sure he would be sorry for her.

‘Pleasant things, I hope?’ he said. He knew nothing, then; could she bring herself to tell him?

‘No, indeed; nothing will ever be pleasant any more!’ said Miss Chevening, in a tone of mournful conviction.

‘I am so sorry—so sincerely sorry,’ he said gently. ‘I hardly dare to ask questions, but—it is not illness?’

‘Nothing to do with illness. We—we shall have to leave our pretty old house, for one thing.’

'You are not leaving England?' he asked anxiously.

'No—I almost wish we were, instead of— But I can't tell you just now, I will try to tell you presently, if I am able. Now, tell me about yourself, and all that you have been doing since we parted.'

Seeing that she evidently meant to change the subject, he gave her as much of his history during the past months as was likely to be of any interest to her, and she listened and made comments which he thought showed a delightful interest in his proceedings, and by-and-by they passed to general topics. And they walked on, past Chiswick Mall (where she professed to know the very house where Miss Pinkerton had once kept her celebrated academy, and the gate through which the Sedley coach had driven that summer day with Amelia and Becky Sharp inside, and black Sambo behind), past the church, and the little angle of eighteenth-century buildings, with the more modern, but still old-fashioned, shops below the red brick bulging fronts and high brown roofs; the butcher's, with its Christmas show of red and white joints; the grocer's, where the heat of the gas made a misty blur on the small-paned shop-fronts. Then into gloom again, under the bulging ivy-topped walls of private parks, with glimpses through the railings of green and mildewed statues, looking slightly uncanny in the gathering gloom; and, here and there, amongst the shadowy trunks and tree-tops, a great cedar rising in darker outline against the grey background. Then along a lonely road facing the west, where a gleam of stormy yellow showed that the sun was setting, and on till the river came in sight once more, and the willows and poplars were delicately traced against a sunset sky which had suddenly become mottled with vivid patches of olive, grey, green, crocus and blue.

They met scarcely anybody; this old-world region, though surrounded by building estates, and villas, and flaring new shops, seems forgotten, untouched amidst so much change—given over for a little longer to dignified decay and ghostly memories of past grandeur; there was a strange intimate charm to him in walking there with her in the silence and solitude, something dreamy and poetic in the place which both felt.

'You are not very far from your journey's end now, Mr. Orme,' she said, with a return to practical life, as they entered the region of brick and stucco once more, and saw the tall mass of the water-tower painted in faint grey monochrome upon the green evening sky. 'I will show you a short cut which will take you to the hotel.'

'The hotel?' he said abstractedly; 'to be sure, I was going there. That reminds me' (the young man was glad to catch at any excuses for prolonging the conversation), 'I don't think I mentioned who it is I am going to see. You remember the Chadwicks at the Californie——?'

'Very well,' she said—the possibility that he was going to call on Mr. Chadwick had already occurred to her—she had expected this, and tried to avert it. Now it had come.

‘I remember,’ he said, ‘that they were not favourites of yours; still it may interest you to hear that the father is going to marry again.’

She would tell him in a moment—not yet; she put off her revelation, not unwilling that he should be impressed by her stoicism. ‘It does interest me—very much,’ she said, with her enigmatic smile. ‘Do you—have you heard who the lady is?’

‘Only the mere fact at present, and not even that till a day or two ago. I am sorry for that poor young fellow.’

‘Sorry—sorry for *him*?’ Miss Chevening flamed out suddenly. ‘*I* should have thought other persons were more to be pitied!’

‘So you haven’t forgiven him even yet!’ he said, smiling at this proof that the old petulant prejudice was still alive; ‘aren’t you rather hard on him, Miss Chevening?’

‘But why should *he* be the person to be pitied for his father’s second marriage?’ she persisted.

The pleasantest conversations generally have a stage at which we could wish, afterwards, they had ended—little as he knew it, Orme was passing that stage now.

‘Well, you see,’ he explained, ‘he’s an only son, and—well, I gathered from what I was told that the lady who is going to marry his father was not doing so out of disinterested affection exactly. And, though you will probably decline to believe that anybody would marry him for love, a woman who does it for money is not likely to prove the best conceivable step-mother, is she?’

They were standing together at the point where the riverside path begins again—though the road is continued inland. In the pain, the indignant surprise, and shame which that imprudent speech of his had excited, all impulse to enlighten him vanished. Where now was the compassion—the respectful and admiring compassion—she had looked for? How could she tell him, after that? Was this how the world would look at it? Oh, the world was cruel and stupid, and she hated it! The scene around her suddenly became dreary and dismal—she hated it all; the humble little riverside cottages and ancient taverns, the muddy path, the dim black barges close in under the bank, between which the water was swashing and gurgling mournfully, the pale river gliding by, the ugly lattice bridge over which a train, a long line of yellow bars, was passing repeated in the water below, all seemed an appropriate background to her wretchedness at that moment.

'I—I don't agree with you at all,' she said tremulously; 'it is *you* who are not charitable now! And,' she added, recovering her dignity, 'I will say good-bye here, please, Mr. Orme.'

He felt that her manner had altered, that he had received his dismissal, but he did not suspect the extent of his offence. She never could mention young Chadwick without that hostility; he ought to have known better, he reflected, as he went on alone, but with no serious uneasiness. Nothing could dash his spirits just then—he had found her again—his beautiful, unforgettable friend, and he had new recollections to live upon until he saw her again—for that he should see her again, he was certain! She was more delightful than ever, less abrupt and imperious, gentler and more subdued. He must not let himself fall in love with her—that was out of the question as yet—but what if, some day—? For a man who was not admittedly in love he found a pleasure in dwelling upon the possibility of becoming so which might have caused him to beware. But perhaps he no longer wished to beware. He had known when he set out to walk that afternoon, so he told himself now, that this afternoon was not to be as any common afternoon.

Margot went on her way in a very different frame of mind: she had been punished, she thought bitterly, for her desire to enjoy Nugent Orme's companionship once more for a little while! When he knew that he had been speaking slightingly to her of her own mother, what would he feel? Would it make him despise them all? And then she remembered his manner when they met by the terrace that afternoon—he *did* like her, she was certain, he had been very glad to see her again, he would be horrified with himself when he knew, and he would be sorry for her. It was useless trying to feel angry with him—he had offended in perfect innocence. She felt that she might be sure of a staunch friend in him. But now she would be leaving London very soon, and then she would lose sight of him—this time altogether perhaps! It might have been so different if—if it were not for this marriage; and, as she reached this point in her meditations, all her displeasure as usual concentrated itself upon one unconscious and unoffending head.

CHAPTER V

A MODUS VIVENDI

On s'ennuie toujours avec les gens avec qui il n'est pas permis de s'ennuyer.
La Rochefoucauld.

Miss Chevening had very little farther to go; after passing a quaint old inn, with a cheery glow behind its striped blinds, an irregular and incongruous row of buildings—small shops, cottages, and at intervals a house of some importance, all standing within a few feet of the river bank—she stopped at a gate close behind which a steep flight of stone steps led up to a door between two slender columns supporting an overhanging bay, and this was Osier House, her home for only a very little while longer.

The door was opened by a housemaid, who was in secret a severe trial to Margot, so far was she from coming up to the West-End standard of domestic smartness and neatness.

'Why, you *have* had a walk, miss!' said this handmaiden, with a cheerful grin, which Margot would have preferred to see exchanged for a cleaner apron; however, all that did not matter much now.

'Yes,' she said; 'have you brought up tea yet, Anne?'

'Why, no; I ain't on'y just come down from tidying myself, miss,' said this unblushing person, 'but I'm going to bring the younger ones theirs in the schoolroom; will you take yours there, or up in the droring-room with the mistress? Mr. Chadwick, *he*'ll be in soon.'

'In the schoolroom,' Miss Chevening interrupted quickly; and, her serenity very far from recovered, she went into the schoolroom, where she found them all engaged over some round game of cards.

'Quite a happy family!' she exclaimed with a touch of her habitual disdain, when she saw that Allen was amongst the party.

'Mother said we were to play,' explained Lettice; 'don't you think we could stop now, Margot?' she added in a plaintive voice.

'It is *so* unpleasant playing with anybody who cheats whenever he can!' struck in Ida. 'I saw him taking my counters.'

'It was only for a lark, Margot,' Allen protested; 'it's not as if we were playing for money.'

'You do draw that distinction then!' said Margot; 'but why cheat at all? it's not generally considered part of the fun—at least not with us!'

'I won't cheat any more,' said Allen, 'if you'll come and play too, Margot?'

'Not even that inducement tempts me,' she returned; 'and, Camilla, I fancy you might let them leave off now; they seem tired of it.'

'Well,' said Miss Henderson, 'if Mr. Allen will excuse us, I do think the game has lasted long enough.'

'*I* didn't want to play cards,' said Allen, who had certainly been given small reason to enjoy this particular game, 'it was your mother set us down to it.'

'Mother didn't know you wouldn't play fair,' said Lettice, who attached a serious importance to winning counters; 'that spoils everything!'

'Yes,' added Reggie, 'it's cheating to look at your cards before playing, and that's what you did everytime; if *you* cheat, we ought all to cheat, or it's not fair!'

'I've told you it was all by way of a joke like!' said Allen; 'but of course I can't do anything to please you—I'm ready enough to stop, I can tell you.'

He was more irritated than usual, for his cheating had been a very obvious and simple performance, due to some blundering idea of promoting the hilarity, which struck him as wanting, for some reason. He was not aware that the humour of an unpopular person must be irresistible indeed to extort success, but then he was not aware either how unpopular he was.

He could not take his eyes from Margot as she stood there, with the delicate colour in her cheeks freshened by her walk; he had hoped she would join them, and, perhaps, take his part against the rest, for he always felt as if he knew her best, and it made him very sore that she, too, should seem to turn against him.

'Please don't let us all lose our tempers,' said Margot; 'they don't understand your peculiar notions about games of chance, Allen, that is all.'

'Now you're bringing that Petits Chevaux business up again!' he said, almost savagely; 'haven't I told you how that was? I didn't think you'd throw that in my teeth, Margot!'

'I had no intention of throwing anything in your teeth,' she returned haughtily; 'they have had enough of cards for this evening, as you must see by this time.'

'Perhaps you've had enough of *me* too?' he asked roughly, though his voice quivered.

Margot shrugged her shoulders. 'No one has said so,' she answered; 'stay by all means, if you like to behave yourself.'

'I *won't* stay!' said Allen—'not to be treated this way. I'm willing enough to be pleasant—but you're all against me, every one of you! Anyone would think I wasn't fit to come near you. You forget it's my father who——'

Margot's eyes gleamed with anger as she held open the door. 'Will you kindly go out of the room before you say another word?' she said, very quietly.

He was cowed in an instant. 'I—I wasn't going to say anything,' he said; 'you—you *drive* me to it—you're so precious hard on a chap!'

'Go!' was all Margot said; and he went, out of the room and out of the house, with a feeling that he was in hopeless disgrace.

The girls looked at one another blankly as the front door slammed. 'We *have* done it now,' said Ida; 'he will tell mother, and she'll be awfully angry; you know how particularly she told us not to quarrel with him.'

'He may tell mother, if he wishes to,' said Margot. 'What a delightful, lovable brother he will make! We ought to be very grateful girls!'

Allen was walking back to the hotel, the only place he could go to, with a growing sense of injustice. He liked them all so much—and they would not like him! and now they had made him lose his temper and say things (or very nearly say them) that he had never meant to do. What had possessed him, and how could he regain Margot's good opinion? He quite believed he was winning it till then, and he could not bear his life if she would not forgive him.

Some one was just leaving the hotel as he came up; he heard his father's voice calling from the portico—'Good-bye; glad you came over, and you may tell your father what I said.'

Then a tall, well set-up figure was about to pass him.

'Orme!' cried Allen; 'I say—Mr. Orme!'

Orme stopped. 'So you're at Chiswick too!' he said; 'why, I haven't seen you since our Trouville time; how are things with you, old fellow?'

There was a kindness in his voice that went to Allen's heart just then. 'They're bad,' he said dolefully—'beastly bad. I'm that wretched, Orme, I can't bear myself!'

Orme drew his arm within his. 'Tell us all about it,' he said encouragingly.

'You've heard my father's going to get married again?' began Allen.

'I have just been told, and to whom!' replied Orme, wincing slightly; he was a little hurt at Margot's reticence, and just beginning to recall with shame his own rash and unpardonable remarks. 'But I can't see,' he continued, 'that you've any reason to be so wretched as that, though I know it's hard perhaps at first.'

Then Allen confided to him the cause of his unhappiness, and the scene which had just taken place. 'I should be nothing but pleased about it,' he concluded, 'if Margot—if *they'd* only show signs of coming round; but they're all against me; I can't satisfy them, do what I will! Mrs. Chevening, she's the only one now that speaks me civil.'

Orme could not help making excuses for Miss Chevening in his heart; he knew the strength of her prejudices, and perhaps he felt what it must be to her to have to receive this unfortunate neglected boy as her equal; he had been as prejudiced himself not so very long ago—he pitied both sides, and her not less of the two.

But he did his best to smooth matters. 'Look here,' he said, 'don't make too much of this—you mustn't expect to get on with them quite at once. Have patience, and it will all come right. All you have to do is to wait. I wouldn't appear to force myself on them, you know. Remember, it's a great change for them as well as for you; they will feel that for a little time—it's natural!'

'But Margot's had plenty of time to get used to me!'

said Allen; 'I thought she was used to me—and now she's as hard on me as the rest of 'em.'

'Miss Chevening is—is quick-tempered, I dare say,' said Nugent, 'but she's generous too. When she sees that you really want to be on good terms with them all, and only ask to be met half-way, depend upon it she will be kinder; she doesn't understand that quite yet.'

'If I could only think that, I wouldn't mind,' he declared; 'she might treat me as unkind as she chose, I'd bear it cheerful! I *would*, Orme, so long as she came round in the end. What I'm so unhappy about is, that p'raps she never *will* come round!'

'She will, my dear fellow,' said Orme; 'I'll answer for it she will, if you're patient. Meet her as if all this had not happened, and let her see that you are ready to forget it and be friends if she chooses, but leave it to her to make any advances.'

'I will,' said Allen; 'I'll do that—thank you, Orme; but I don't believe it'll be any use. I know *I'd* be glad enough if it would!'

Orme parted from him at the Gunnersbury Station with a deeper pity. 'Poor young fellow!' he was thinking, 'I wonder if I gave him the right advice—I hope I have. She can so well afford to treat him decently, with all the advantages on her side. I don't believe she can be bad-hearted, with that face! Still, he will have a good deal to overcome.' And then he occupied himself with the more personal consideration of whether he, too, had offended irremediably that afternoon. 'If I had known, I would have cut my tongue out sooner than make that infernally foolish speech!' he thought irritably; 'but who could have thought such a thing possible? There, it's no use thinking of it!'

As he went back to his rooms his expedition began to appear more eventful than satisfactory. 'We're both in the same boat,' he told himself grimly, 'except that he has a chance of putting himself right with her, and I haven't—unless it comes at the Vicarage some day.'

Chadwick came in that evening as usual. 'Christmas will be on us very soon now,' he remarked (he had a talent for platitude). 'Day after to-morrow. Well, it will be rather a different sort of Christmas from the ones I've had to spend for the last twenty years!'

'A pleasanter, I hope!' said Mrs. Chevening.

'Ah, you may say that.' Why, last year, except a half-share in a concern that hadn't paid for eighteen months, I wasn't worth a rupee. I didn't keep Christmas much out there, I can tell you. But they take care you don't forget it in the old country. You wouldn't believe the number of begging letters I get, which reminds me—you'll be interested in this, young lady,' he added, turning to Margot, who knew what was coming and tried hard to seem indifferent,—'who d'ye suppose now I had calling on me this afetrnoon?—some one you've met. Give a guess.'

'I never was clever at guessing!' replied Margot, hoping that her face was not betraying her.

'Well, I thought you'd have guessed this—it was that clever young tutor fellow I got for my boy. Came about some fund or other his father, the Vicar, got me to say I'd do something for. Young Orme didn't know who was to be the second Mrs. Chadwick till I told him, Selina. A rare surprise it was to him to find she'd turned out to be an old friend of his!'

'Really, Joshua,' said Mrs. Chevening, 'I should hardly call him a friend of mine. I never particularly noticed him.'

'Ah, and I suppose I shall hear now that Miss Margot didn't notice him particularly either!'

'Of course I noticed him,' said Margot calmly; 'I saw and spoke to him several times—he was one of your friends. What then?'

'Nothing that I know of,' answered Chadwick, who was not quite at ease with this stately step-daughter of his. 'I asked him to come back with me and have a talk about old times with you two ladies, but he said he must get back to town.'

'I can't profess to be sorry to have missed him,' said Mrs. Chevening; 'he was not the sort of young man that I take much interest in; and besides, we are not likely to see anything of him again.'

'I don't know that,' said Chadwick; 'he'll be down at the Vicarage sometimes, I dare say, for the holidays; he's going down to-morrow, he said. I thought I told you his father was the Vicar of Gorsecombe.'

Margot listened, and all at once, for some reason she could not account for, her lot seemed to have grown more supportable. She found comfort, excitement even, in the thought that her mother's marriage would bring her nearer to some one who she instinctively felt admired her, whose good opinion she valued, whose sympathy she desired.

He would be there now and then to see the trials she would have to submit to, and her heroism under them—for of course she would be heroic. She forgot the humiliation she had felt at the idea of his learning her changed fortunes. After all, it was through no fault of hers—why hadn't she told him herself at once? She fancied she knew what had led him to decline Mr. Chadwick's offer to bring him to Osier House, and liked him the better for it.

Altogether, when Allen came in presently, full of misgivings but resolved to carry out Orme's advice, he found, to his joy and surprise, that it was no longer necessary. Margot seemed entirely to have forgotten her recent displeasure, and was gentler and more nearly cordial than he had ever known her yet. She even began a conversation with him of her own accord, while their respective parents were discussing some decorator's plans at the other end of the room, and for the first time she condescended to show an interest in the neighbourhood they were all to live in. If her questions reverted from time to time to the Vicarage and its occupants, he was not likely to notice that under the new sensation of finding his remarks received with attentive interest.

He took this to be a sign that her heart smote her with a sense that she had been unkind, and that she had set herself to make amends. It was true what

Orme had said—she was generous; but, whether kind or cruel, generous or unforgiving, she exercised a power over him that would be hard to destroy.

Christmas passed, the new year outwore its novelty, and, according to the calendar, winter was already giving place to spring, though shrivelling winds and black frosts gave an even more bitterly ironical turn than usual to the season of promise and hope.

But at Osier House Miss Chevening had other things to occupy her thoughts than the state of the weather; her mother's marriage was to take place at the end of the month, and time was rushing on in a whirl of preparation in which she could not avoid being more or less involved, however she tried to keep aloof.

Mrs. Chevening always resented the indifference her eldest daughter displayed in the arrangements that were being made in their future home. She would come home after having been absent all day, superintending the redecoration and furnishing which she had persuaded Chadwick were indispensable, and would find Margot provokingly uninterested.

'Really, the house looks quite a different place already!' she would say. 'I've chosen the sweetest paper for *your* room, dearest one, with a pattern of all willow leaves in blended tints of pale olive—quite simple, but *so* pretty!'

'Have you, dear?' Margot would answer; 'thank you.'

'I wanted you to choose for yourself, you know, but you wouldn't, you idle child.' (It was not idleness, as her mother knew very well, though she chose to consider it so.) 'Now do rouse yourself from that chair and come here and say what you think you would like to go with the paper—here are all the patterns.'

'I can't tell without having seen the paper.'

'I kept a piece on purpose—there, I'll save you the trouble of coming, I'll bring the patterns to you. Am I not a good mother?'

Margot would turn over the little books with listless white fingers for a few moments, and then give them back, saying, 'I really don't mind what it is, mother; choose what you think best and I shall be quite satisfied.'

'That is not a very grateful return for Mr. Chadwick's kindness—he was particularly anxious that your tastes should be considered in every way.'

'Was he? it is kind of him; but really I've no preferences.'

'Then am I to tell the upholsterer's man he may put up what he pleases?'

'If you like, dear,' Miss Chevening would reply languidly; and then, with more animation, '*Not* the upholsterer's man, mother! *you* choose for me!'

'Indeed, my dear, if you do not think it worth taking some trouble about, yourself, I certainly shall not worry about it.'

'Well, I *will* just look at the patterns and paper once more,' Miss Chevening was reduced to saying humbly, with a sense of being untrue to herself.

Margot had resolved beforehand that, if she was compelled to enter the house of bondage, she would not at least be so compliant as to betray any interest in the appointments of her prison-chamber. Perhaps, however, she felt that she could place reliance upon her mother's taste; whereas that not unskilful mention of the upholsterer had shattered all her apathy at a blow.

On one other point, too, she had been roused to disregard her personal dignity. Her mother had hinted at keeping Anne in her service as a maid for her daughters. This was more than Miss Chevening's philosophy could stand.

'Please, not Anne, dear!' she said.

'She seemed so anxious to come,' said her mother; 'she's been with us eighteen months, and she's a very respectable girl. I thought you liked her, dear.'

'Oh, I like her very well,' replied Margot, 'but I don't want a maid.'

'If you don't, Ida and Lettie will, as nurse is going.'

'Well, then,' said Margot, driven desperate, 'if we must have one, do let us have somebody about us who is nice and attractive to look at. I couldn't bear to let Anne touch me! Surely, *now*, we can have maids like other people?'

'Anne is a dreadful slattern, certainly. If I advertise, will you see the people when they come for the place?'

'No, dear, you see them,' pleaded Margot; 'I shouldn't know in the least what to say to them, or ask them, I'm so helpless in all these things.'

So she obtained her own way, without having to undertake any personal exertion. She was weak after all; even her opposition to the marriage was not so strong as it had been. She caught herself sometimes forming plans and anticipations for the new life with a fickleness which she despised. There were moments when she actually had to remind herself of the unparalleled indignity to which she would be constantly exposed, and the surest means of doing so was to think of Allen Chadwick, who little suspected his efficacy as a mental stimulant.

And now the remaining days of Mrs. Chevening's widowhood had dwindled to very few indeed; the banns had been twice read out in the church by the riverside. Margot had heard them announced once with downcast eyes and hot cheeks—'between Joshua Smithson Chadwick, widower, of the parish of Gorsecombe, Pineshire, and Selina Letitia Chevening, widow, of this parish.' There was no just cause or impediment except to the mind of the girl who sat there with the vision before her of a neglected grave far away on a forgotten Asian battlefield.

'I suppose,' said Chadwick one evening, 'it isn't the right thing to have bridesmaids—eh, Selina?'

'Surely you know that!' was the answer.

'Well, I'm not up in these matters—the only time I went through it we got it done at a Registry office. But there's no harm in treating the two elder girls as bridesmaids in one respect, I dare say?'

Margot, who, with Ida, was in the room at the time, looked up quickly.

‘I don’t in the least know what you mean,’ said her mother.

Chadwick was feeling in his pockets with a comfortable sort of chuckle.

‘Why, I don’t profess, as I said, to know about these things, but I understand it’s usual for the happy man to give the bridesmaids a small present, just to remember the occasion by. So’—here he tossed a packet into Margot’s lap and another upon the sofa where Ida was sitting—‘there’s yours, and there’s *yours*.’

‘Joshua,’ cried Mrs. Chevening, ‘how kind you are to my poor girls—they haven’t words to thank you just yet . . . it is really too—too good of you to think of them!’

Margot was opening the parcel with reluctant deliberation; inside was a morocco case, which she found to contain a locket. It was of immense size and solidity, and in the centre was a large carbuncle set in turquoises and an enamelled border. It was costly and it was undeniably hideous. She gazed at it in dismay.

‘Handsome articles, aren’t they?’ said Chadwick complacently; ‘they’re both alike. I told the jeweller to make me a duplicate, so that you shouldn’t say I made any distinctions between you. I think your mother would like to have a look when you’ve done, young lady.’

It is always embarrassing to express gratitude in words, but never more so, perhaps, than when we are called upon to thank some one we do not like for something we do not want.

Margot would have given anything to be able to refuse this gift, especially as it was not an ornament she could bring herself to wear, but she knew that anything but acceptance was impossible. She crossed to where Chadwick was sitting and held out her hand meekly. 'I can only say "Thank you,"' she said.

'Well, well,' he replied, 'I know young ladies are fond of finery—mind, you take care of it, that's all. But aren't you going to give me a kiss for it?'

Margot cast an appealing glance at her mother, who judged it better to interpose.

'Margot never was a kissing person, Joshua, so I think you must excuse her. I'm sure she is very, very grateful for so—so handsome a present—aren't you, darling?'

'Yes, mother,' said Margot, escaping with relief.

Ida, who had not been equally fortunate, joined her presently in a little sitting-room at the back.

'Aren't they dreadful, Margot?' she exclaimed.

'Hideous!' said Miss Chevening, opening the case containing her own locket, and regarding it with unconcealed distaste. '*Why* must he give us anything, and why such things as these?'

'Shall you wear yours, Margot?'

'Wear it?' exclaimed Miss Chevening. 'Wear *this*! How could I? I wish it wasn't wrong to want to throw it into the river. No, I shall have to keep it, but I will not—I simply will *not* wear it!'

'Is that the way you talk of presents when they're given you?' said a voice from the doorway. It was

Allen's; he had come up to the hotel again that week and had been in the drawing-room, a witness to the presentation scene, though the girls had not noticed him at the time. Now he had followed them out with a hope of receiving some thanks for his own share in the transaction, which consisted in helping his father in the difficult work of selection.

'You were not intended to hear what we said,' said Miss Chevening loftily.

'You spoke loud enough,' he said, 'and the door was left open—but look here, what's the matter with the lockets?'

'Nothing,' said Margot, 'nothing is the matter with the lockets—they are very big and expensive and handsome.'

'That's what *I* should have said. Why won't you wear them, then?'

'You don't understand these things,' said Margot, feeling it useless to deny her words. 'Girls of our—of our age, don't wear expensive jewels like these.'

'They're not so expensive as they look,' said the candid Allen.

'Expensive or not, they are not the sort of things that are worn—that was all we meant.'

'Then I'll tell the governor, and get him to have them changed,' he proposed.

'If you wish to make mischief, do so, but I warn you that, if you say a word of what you had no right to listen to at all, I will never speak to you again if I can help it. I mean it, Allen.'

'I didn't mean it for mischief, only to do you a good turn,' he protested; 'but if you don't want me to say anything, why, I won't, and there's an end of it. Why do you always try to make out that I'm intending what never came in my head?'

'Don't let it come into your head, then.'

'Well,' he said, 'whether you wear those lockets or not, they're worth something, you know. They aren't expensive, considering they look so showy; but you could sell them each any day in the week for fifteen pounds a-piece at the very least—any jeweller 'd give you that for 'em!'

'It is a pity that so much money has been wasted upon us,' said Margot, lifting her chin, 'because, you see, we are not in the habit of selling our jewellery, whether we are able to wear it or not.'

'Of course I know you wouldn't do it yourselves,' he said, 'but you might want money on a sudden some day. I'd manage it all for you. I've had to do it with things of my own now and then. It's useful to know—that's all I meant.'

'When I think proper to entrust you with any of my belongings to dispose of,' returned Miss Chevening, with freezing dignity, 'I shall let you know. I am not quite reduced to that just yet.'

'There's nothing to be offended at,' he said, between shame and sullenness; 'none was intended, I'm sure.'

'There is no use in being offended. If you could only understand that money is not the principal object in life, your conversation would be so much pleasanter to listen to, that's all.'

'I dare say, if all was known, I'm not more set on money than other people,' he retorted. 'I've known what it was to want it. Tell me what I can say that will be pleasant to listen to, and I'll try to oblige.'

'Then I will,' said Margot. 'It would be very pleasant to hear you say, well—something of this sort: "I'm afraid I am interrupting you, so I'll leave you to finish your talk."'

'Ah!' he said bitterly, 'you don't try to make *your* conversation over-pleasant, anyhow. I suppose that's a hint for me to go?'

'You are getting quite quick at seeing things, Allen,' remarked Ida.

Margot began to be afraid she had said too much. 'No, but, Allen,' she said, more gently, 'don't think it unkind, but we really would rather be alone just now.'

'If you'd spoken like that at first,' he said, 'I wouldn't have minded. I don't wish to stay where I'm not wanted, only I like to be treated civil.'

'We will treat you "civil," then,' said Margot, holding out her hand; 'there, good night, Allen . . . Oh, how rough you are, you have crushed my hand!'

'I—I didn't mean to. I can't do anything right, I know; good-night.'

And one dull bleak day in March, with a low grey-green sky from which a few small snowflakes fell occasionally and a dry lead-coloured haze that was more depressing than fog, Mrs. Chevening was united in holy wedlock to Joshua Chadwick in the church on the river-bank, and the tradesmen of Chiswick and Turnham Green, though they refrained from any open manifestations, rejoiced inwardly with an exceeding great joy.

Margot was in the church and heard her mother pronounce the word which assigned herself and them to a strange and unknown power. Lettice was there, and said afterwards that it would have been much more cheerful if they had only lighted the chanticleer. Ida wept in torrents with the luxury of really having something to weep for. Allen was there in the lightest of his gloves and trousers, like a super at one of the interrupted weddings on the stage. Lord and Lady Yaverland honoured the ceremony with their presence and left early.

That is all that need be said here of that wedding, important as the stage is which it marks in this history.

Still a little later and the last farewell had been said to the dear old house of which the Chevening family had during their mother's honeymoon—as that period must, however inappropriately, be called—been in undisturbed possession.

They had arrived at their new home, Agra House. Even Miss Chevening was compelled to own in her private mind that it might have been much worse. It was big, and florid, and pretentious, but it had been designed with a view to comfort, and now the interior had been decorated, and furnished, according to her mother's directions, and contained nothing to offend the eye. The grounds, too, were large and well laid out.

There was a surprise in store for Miss Chevening. When she rang for her maid, the girl her mother had engaged in place of cashiered homely Anne, the face of the person who answered her ring seemed strangely and not quite pleasantly familiar. At last she remembered. 'I think,' she observed carelessly, 'we last met on board the Littlehampton steamer, and you were extremely uncivil.'

Susan, for it was the same girl whom she had heard abusing little Henri on the Trouville *plage*, reddened under her freckles. 'Was I, miss?' she said; 'I beg your pardon, I'm sure, if I was; but I'd just lost my place, miss, and my feelings was hurt. I wasn't answerable for what I said; and, seeing I'm here,' she went on, 'though little thinking to wait on you, miss, I hope you won't say anything to get me turned away. I can truly say I'll do my best to give satisfaction.'

Margot looked at the girl: she was neatly if coquettishly dressed; she was rather good-looking; she seemed deft-handed and respectful; she would do well enough.

'So long as you understand that you are to treat Miss Lettie with proper respect,' she said, 'I shall not interfere. But you will kindly remember you are not in France, and that you are my sisters' maid, not their nurse.'

'Yes, miss; certainly, miss, thank you; and I'm sure I'm obliged to you,' said Susan. But outside the door she said: 'I thought my place was gone as soon as I saw her face. Well, I've got round her this time, so I needn't bother. That pride o' yours may have a fall some fine day, young lady, and when it does I should like to be at hand looking on!'

Book III

PRELIMINARIES TO HANGING A DOG

CHAPTER I

COMMENTS AFTER CHURCH

> Who marks in church time others' symmetry,
> Makes all their beauty his deformity.
>
> *G. Herbert.*

On a certain bright April Sunday, those of the inhabitants of Gorsecombe who had attended the parish church found themselves at the conclusion of the service provided with a more than commonly exciting topic.

Mr. Chadwick and his newly-acquired family had made their first appearance there in public, causing the devotions of too many among the congregation to resemble those of Claudius, King of Denmark.

In the churchyard and on the homeward ways tongues generally were let loose in criticism, curiosity, and speculation.

Mrs. Eddlestone, of Holly Bank, a widow with strong social inclinations and three plain but accomplished daughters, conscientiously refrained from mentioning the subject until the lych-gate was cleared, when, without waiting for Miss Momber to finish her strictures on the folly of keeping the church stove alight so late in the spring, she began forthwith: 'So the Agra House people have come back at last?'

'Oh, yes,' said Miss Momber, 'the governess and the girls arrived on Friday—they had the carriage to meet them and a cart for the luggage, and I suppose the bride and bridegroom must have come last night.'

'I wonder how it was we never heard of it—take care, my dear, or you'll be run over, that new coachman the Hothams have does drive so recklessly, some one really ought to speak to them about it. Came last night, did they? Well, they haven't lost any time in showing themselves. I must say she is rather better than I had expected, and the daughters quite pretty—which makes it more of a pity, you know!'

'Why?' asked Miss Momber bluntly—'how a pity?'

'Well, I suppose we can't very well call on them—no one has, yet.'

'That was different—he was living alone then. *I* shall call as soon as they've had time to settle down.'

'Shall you, really?' (Mrs. Eddlestone was surprised, for Miss Momber had the reputation of being extremely exclusive.) 'I wouldn't mind for myself, but, with my girls to consider, I hardly like to risk it. The late man was not recognised by anyone, to speak of, and no one seems to know this one. And I must say I thought her manner in church this morning so unbecoming; such affectation to pretend not to know that people were looking at her, and the daughters, too, dressed so conspicuously!'

'I thought they had on very pretty frocks.' (Here Miss Momber glanced at the backs of the three Miss

Eddlestones in front, for whom a local dressmaker had too evidently done her very worst.) 'She's rather too fine for him—that's all *I* see against her.'

'But we don't know who she *was*.'

'Weren't you there when Mr. Liversedge was telling me? Oh no, you had left. She's the widow of a colonel who was killed in India some years ago, and she has a sister who is married to Lord Yaverland.'

'Oh,' said Mrs. Eddlestone. 'Well, I suppose we ought to make them feel as much at home as possible. Gorsecombe will be all the better for a little fresh blood. What day were you thinking of calling? You might look in for me on your way up.'

In the main street of the village were little knots of 'chapel folk' who had been dismissed half an hour before, but still lingered at various doors in the spring sunshine. As Chadwick and his wife, followed by Allen and the three girls (Reggie was away at school), passed up the centre of the road many eyes regarded them.

'I should ha' thought,' said Mrs. Nutkins, a widow who kept a small sweetstuff and fruit shop, 'as he might ha' give the preference to Ebenezer, as was built by his own father, just this first Sunday of all, go where he might afterwards. To think he's never set a foot in the chapel, and his father, poor old gentleman, fillin' his pew reg'lar Sunday after Sunday and always a sovereign in the plate when it come round, and the curtain he had put up in his seat for the drafties, there to this day to testify to him.'

'They do say,' said Mr. Spufford, the serious draper, 'that this one has been away out in India years and years, nigger slave-driving. That may have set him against chapel going—there's no telling.'

'More likely it's this dressed-up fine madam of a wife of his, as thinks it beneath her to worship except it's along of the gentry. Not as he's one of them, by rights. I've heard tell as his father was only a big draper like, up at London, and began wonderful small, no bigger than yourself, Mr. Spufford.'

Mr. Spufford was a stout young man with a puffy white face, mutton-chop whiskers and small eyes. 'Small beginnings may be wonderfully blest,' he said, with pious hopefulness; 'but it's sad to see a brother forsaking the faith of his forefathers and taking to himself a wife from amongst the Philistines. Not but what there's this much to be thankful for, Mrs. Nutkins, that we're spared from having the latest spring fashions entering into Ebenezer and causing the eyes of our young maidens to offend—look at it that way, ma'am!'

'Ah, you're such a one for making the best o' things, but neither you nor me nor many in Gorsecombe 'll be any the better off for them being here—they'll have everything sent down from London they can, and what custom they give 'll go to church folk over chapel, you see if it don't!'

'Well,' said Mr. Spufford, with a martyr's sigh, 'it will be all made up to us in another world, that is one comfort, Mrs. Nutkins. And now I must be going in to my dinner, if you'll excuse me. Shall I see you at chapel this evening?'

In the kitchen of the Seven Stars sat old Mrs. Parkinjear, the landlady, waiting for her granddaughter's return from church. Mrs. Parkinjear was a stout old lady with a brown front and a velvet band across her forehead. At every sound from the back-door she turned in that direction a pair of pale eyes as unspeculative in expression as a pair of glass marbles, for the poor old lady was sightless.

At last there was the noise of the key raising the latch, and steps on the brick floor.

'I thought you was never coming, child; leaving me all this time, and me sitting here in my lonely blindness, thinking of all that was and now is no more. You're never just back from church?'

'Yes, granny,' said Cassandra; 'why, it's only twenty to one now, and we're never out much before the half-hour.'

'Then 'tis time that goes slower to me in my ending days. Did the Vicar preach, dear man? Ah, time was I used to love to sit and hear his discourses, when I had my eyesight, but that's finished now—and I'm finished, too, very near! Who was at church, Cassandry?'

'Most everybody that's usually there, granny—and oh! some besides. Mr. Chadwick's new lady up at Agra House—him and her was there, with such beautiful-looking young ladies, dressed I couldn't tell you how nice! And one, the littlest, had the loveliest hair, and the sun shone down on it so bright through the painted winder.'

'So there's a family, and pretty, you say? Dear, dear, and me not able to see it! The old gentleman that's gone used to look in for a chat with me, many's the time. I liked him, I did, though there wasn't many about these parts that had a good word for him, except it was the Ebenezer folk—which he built and erected it out of his own purse, so they had ought to it. I wasn't of his way of thinking, but he was fond of a talk with me. "I've a son out in Injia somewheres," he'd say to me, when I was a-tellin him all about your uncle Joe and the trouble I'd had with him. "You'll be thinking o' sending for him to be a comfort to your declining years?" I'd say to him. "No, Mrs. Parkinjear, I shan't," he'd say to me. "I don't rightly know where to send for him, and maybe he wouldn't come if I did. I've treated him harsh in times gone by," he told me, "and it's too late to put it right now; but when I'm took for death he'll find out as I've done what I could to make it up to him." It was along of some marriage his son had made as the old man didn't hold with. And now here's the son in his place with a boy of his own, and married again to a widder with children of *her* own! And all of 'em in church together this very morning. Well, well! we live in times, Cassandry, we do that! Ah, dear, and this is a world of changes. The young gentleman, now—it'll make a sad difference to him, poor thing, his nose being so put out of j'int, vulgarly speaking, with a new mamma and a family when he'd been everybody. They say his father made a deal on him when they were just here alone together.'

'He looked not to mind it much, from his face,' said Cassandra.

'Didn't he, now? Well, he'll have playmates now and companions, true enough. Postman used to tell me he'd meet him along the lanes, lookin' fit to yawn the head off his shoulders, and no one to go about with but that young Barchard, that isn't fit company for nobody, from all I hear.'

Over the mid-day dinner at the Vicarage, too, the new arrivals were being discussed. 'Mamma,' said Millicent Orme, 'you will call on them now, won't you? I'm sure they're nice!'

Millicent was short, and had none of her brother's good looks, but her plain and rather homely face was saved from being insignificant by its animation. In character she was a warm-hearted girl with a large capacity for enthusiasm, and a strong sense of duty.

'I suppose we shall have to call,' said Mrs. Orme; 'but I do hope, Millicent, you will wait a little before you strike up one of your violent friendships.'

'But I know I shall like that eldest girl,' persisted Millicent; 'she is such a lovely person; she came up the aisle like some kind of splendid princess. Papa, didn't you think she was lovely?'

'Really, Millicent,' Mrs. Orme interposed, 'you seem to forget how your father was engaged this morning! As if he could possibly allow himself to notice such things during the service!'

'After that,' said the Vicar, with a twinkle of humour in his eye, 'I feel a little difficulty in admitting that I *did* notice them all. However, such is the scandalous fact, my dear. The only defence I can offer is that they were a few feet in front of me, and that I have been constructed with eyes of average capacity.'

'And isn't the eldest girl lovely, papa?'

'She—a—struck me as being a very beautiful creature, certainly,' was the reply. 'I trembled for poor Fanshawe's peace of mind when I heard how he read the first lesson. He's a susceptible youth, even for a curate.'

'I don't at all approve of Mr. Fanshawe's proceedings,' said Mrs. Orme; 'I wish he was a little more serious—he really behaves just like an ordinary young man.'

'He *is* an ordinary young man,' said the Vicar. 'Surely, my dear, you don't consider that the average curate is hedged by any divinity in particular? Fanshawe's divinity would make rather a scrappy hedge, I'm afraid. Some might say the same of his Vicar's, for that matter.' And the Rev. Cyprian gave a sigh, half comic, half genuine.

He was a tall, portly man, very handsome still, with silvered hair, which contrasted well with his strong dark eyebrows and clear roseate complexion. He was a little conscious sometimes of not fulfilling the highest ideal of the priestly character, and he was apt to shock some of his parishioners by a manner which was unparsonical, not to say secular. He was clever, and had been cleverer still, indolent and easy-going, with a sense of humour that was occasionally inconvenient. His wife, who was almost exempted from this complaint, was a little exercised at times by his lapses from clerical decorum, though she generally abstained from any direct reproof, preferring to convey it by implication.

In appearance she was a bright-eyed anxious little woman, who had worried away any good looks she had originally possessed.

'I'm sure you preach beautiful sermons, Cyprian,' she said; 'you know how much all the people like them—they go straight home to them, they always say.'

'It must be down their throats then,' said the Vicar. 'I feel very much as if I were preaching to a congregation of fishes sometimes.'

'But about this new Mrs. Chadwick, mamma,' said Millicent. 'Don't you think this marriage will be an excellent thing? I do. I never saw anyone so changed as that son of Mr. Chadwick's. He used to look so dull and heavy and uninterested, and now, in church this morning, he seemed quite bright and happy. It made me like him ever so much better, because some only sons would have taken their father's marriage so very differently.'

'So you're making *him* out a phœnix, too, Millicent, eh?' interrupted the Vicar.

'Only in that. I used to dislike him very much, and pitied poor Nugent for having to go abroad with him; but I've got to like him better lately. When you think how little education he has had, he might be so much worse than he is!'

'He might be a little more picturesque with advantage,' said her father lazily. 'He's one of those young fellows who always strike one as incomplete without a pen behind his ear. Capital ear for a pen!'

'I think you are rather unkind, papa!'

'It was quite unintentional, my dear,' said the Vicar. 'I assure you I have the highest respect for commerce and everybody connected with it. All I meant was that a boyhood passed in purely mechanical office-work is not, perhaps, the ideal preparation for the life of a country gentleman, which I should say was undeniable.'

'Are you sure that he was a clerk, papa?'

The Vicar chuckled. 'No, Millie, I am not. I have sometimes had a dark suspicion that he was nearer the rank of office-boy. As a matter of fact, I don't know what he was; at all events it's not of vital importance. He is an addition, numerically, at all events, to Gorsecombe society now. His father isn't a bad fellow in his own way. Sends me a cheque like a man when I appeal for any of my funds. I should say those young ladies will find him a very liberal stepfather, if they go the right way to manage him.'

In the long oak drawing-room at Hawleigh Court that afternoon, the Chadwick marriage was honoured by being made the subject of conversation.

One or two privileged neighbours had dropped in about five o'clock; Mr. Liversedge being among them. The long drawing-room was a very inviting place, particularly just now. The low ceiling with its groining and stalactite-like bosses was almost lost in shadow, and through the latticed and mullioned windows the formal yews, box-trees, and urns on the terrace took the colours of old tapestry against the delicate pink and primrose hues of a spring sunset.

Joceline Hotham—a sunny-faced, yellow-haired girl, who just missed being pretty—was presiding at the small tea-table; Lady Adela, her mother, a large, handsome, rather stupid-looking woman, occupied a couch near the fire, in which situation she could join in the conversation when she felt disposed, and shut her eyes in luxurious wakefulness in the interim.

'Tea?' Miss Hotham was saying to Mr. Liversedge. 'I haven't given you any cream. Why weren't you at your parish church this morning, please?'

'Domestic anxiety,' he explained hypocritically; 'work of necessity. You see, one of my sister's canary birds wasn't at all the thing this morning, not at all the thing, and so I stayed at home to keep it company—fact, Miss Hotham, I assure you!'

'If you are a heathen, you need not make a joke of it—it's serious. And to-day you really missed something. All the good people of Gorsecombe exciting themselves tremendously—and what do you suppose about? Just because that planter man who has the house with the Indian name just above the village happened to bring his new wife and family to church for the first time. But you ought to have been there.'

'Yes, I see now that I have grossly neglected my duties. I must go and pay my respects to her some time—charming woman!'

'Then you have seen her?' said Lady Adela.

'Oh! I know her—know her well. Knew her first husband, the Colonel, out in India; fine fellow he was, too. Left her very fairly off, but she must needs go and burn her fingers with stocks and shares and muddle most of it away. But for that, she'd never have looked at this man.'

'What's wrong with the man—is he an acquaintance of yours, too?' asked Lady Adela.

'He was in my district at one time, and I came across him occasionally. Didn't like him. Some of the planters out there were pleasant fellows enough, but *they* couldn't stand him—he put their backs up when he first came, by siding with the missionaries.'

'A very right and proper thing to do in *my* opinion!' said the lady.

'Ah, but that didn't last long, he soon quarrelled with them, and then he was out in the cold. He seemed to change his character altogether after he'd been out a little while; became a reckless, violent, overbearing sort of fellow who cared for nobody, went regularly to the bad for a time—quite a scandal he caused out there. Now he's come into this fortune he's reformed, sown his wild oats (or his wild indigo) and turned respectable.'

'And how did this new wife of his come to marry him?'

'Ah, I can tell you the whole story, as it happens, for I had the honour of bringing it about. If she hadn't known me and been perfectly sure it was all right about the money, she wouldn't have risked it. It was at Trouville—we were all at the same hotel there—and after what I told her, I saw she was trying to catch either the son for her daughter, or the father for herself; it was much the same to her. And would you believe it, Lady Adela, that man, who owes his domestic felicity to me, is actually huffy still about some ridiculous ryots I found shut up in his factory and had to wig him for?'

'Who did you say *she* was?' inquired Lady Adela.

'She was a Mrs. Chevening.'

'Then that explains it!' cried Miss Hotham, starting up excitedly with a sparkle in her blue eyes. 'I was wondering all through the sermon where it was I had seen that eldest girl's face before. She was at school with me. I used to admire her so awfully—all the girls did—but she's improved since then. Mother, couldn't you drive over there some day and take me? I should so like to see her again!'

'I see no reason for calling there at all,' said Lady Adela. 'I don't approve of such marriages, and I shall certainly not go out of my way to countenance them.'

'And mayn't I ride over—just to see her?'

'Not on any account, Joceline; you will probably meet her somewhere, and if you like to recognise her, of course you may. Other people may do as they please about calling, but I shall be very careful not to set the example myself.'

And so, at Hawleigh at least, it was settled that the Chadwicks were not to be taken up—a result to which Mr. Liversedge's small talk had largely contributed; though, to balance this, he had in other quarters supplied information which decided the lesser lights of Gorsecombe society that the new mistress of Agra House was not a person they could afford to turn their backs upon.

To return to the subjects of all these conversations, whom we left walking home through the village in happy ignorance of the discussion their appearance had provoked.

'Well, Selina,' said Chadwick grimly, 'we've got *that* over; they'll know us next Sunday.'

'I thought you had lived in this place some months,' said Mrs. Chadwick, in rather a chagrined tone.

'So I have, off and on,' he replied. 'Why?'

'Only,' she said, 'that you don't seem to know any of the people yet.'

'Didn't you see little Prisk, the chemist, come up and speak to me as we went out?' he asked; 'and Jobson, the butcher, touched his hat in the churchyard.'

'The chemist! the butcher!' she repeated with a touch of contempt; 'I meant any of the *good* people. Who were the family who sat in the big pew next to the chancel?'

'Oh, I know *them*, of course—the Hothams, of Hawleigh, a few miles from here; heavy swells, I can tell you. He's a baronet and she was an earl's daughter.'

'You know them; then why didn't they come and speak to you?'

'I didn't mean know them in that way. I know who they *are*, that's all. You didn't think they'd condescend to take any notice of *me*, did you? Why, they're *county* people!' And he laughed at so extravagant an idea.

'No doubt I was very absurd,' said his wife, and bit her lips. Perhaps she had never realised till then the descent she had made; a horrible fear came upon her that she might find herself condemned, after all, to a position outside the pale of this dull little village, or, worse still, visited by the least considerable of the inhabitants as a mark of condescension. Was not even the state of aristocratic pauperism in a shabby old house in a London suburb, where she at least enjoyed a certain amount of consideration, better than such a lot as this? Why had she shut her eyes to such a possibility; why had she persuaded herself that her poverty was so intolerable, and that she could both escape it by this marriage and retain all the social advantages that she had always valued?

She walked on by the side of the husband whose companionship became every day a greater burden to her. Was his to be the sole society she could expect henceforward?—she shivered at the thought. After all, she reflected, this was not a very probable contingency; county society might be exclusive, but in these days even county society would hardly consider it a disqualification to have been an indigo-planter—probably a fair proportion of their younger sons were out tea-planting or cattle-ranching now. If the indigo had been all—and then she glanced aside at her husband, with his plebeian features burnt an indelible red by Indian suns, and rendered even less distinguished than they might be from the shape and cut of his patchy beard. In his white hat with the black band, his aggressive white waistcoat, his frock coat with the large swinging skirts, he seemed out of place in a village. She could not wonder if local magnates were to hold aloof, and yet—no, she would not despair, it was too early to do that at present, and she remembered the movement of startled involuntary admiration of the congregation as her children passed down the aisle. It was only a question of waiting—she must conquer in the end.

'Hennie, dear,' said Ida to Miss Henderson, as they walked a few paces behind, 'I think I shall love going to church here; shan't you?' For Miss Henderson had been induced to remain for the present at an increased salary, and Ida was overcome with gratitude for such devoted attachment.

Miss Henderson sighed: 'We shall at all events be able to look forward to one or two sweet peaceful hours in each week, when the strain will be relaxed for a time; yes, Ida, no one can rob us of that!'

No one, it is true, had shown any intention of wishing to do so, but that trifling fact did not in Ida's eyes affect the beauty of the sentiment.

'How brave you are, Hennie; I wonder what I *should* do without you!'

'Poor child, it is harder for you than any of them; you are such a sensitive darling. They may part us yet—but there, we won't meet troubles half-way. It is a dear church, and what a nice voice that curate had who read the first lesson!'

'Yes; he had nice eyes, too, Hennie, didn't you think, and he read beautifully, if he hadn't lost the place so often.'

And they continued the conversation in a confidential tone, perhaps from a fear lest it might reach Margot's ears, for Miss Chevening was apt to be rather contemptuous of this kind of talk.

They were safe enough, however, for she was at a considerable distance in the rear with Lettice and Allen.

'Do you know, Margot,' said Lettice, 'I don't think they're at all polite people in this village—they stared so *dread*fully!'

'You should have stared at them back,' said Allen.

'Then I should have been rude, too. I did stare at the monuments, though. Such a lot of Hothams, Margot, did you notice?'

Margot came out of her reverie with a start. 'The Hothams! What do you know about the Hothams, Lettie?'

'Nothing—they seemed to be mostly dead, and they had all the biggest tablets, that's all!'

'Oh, are they, though?' said Allen; 'that was Sir Everard and Lady Adela, and their daughters, in that pew opposite—the big square one.'

'I should have thought they'd be in black—with so many deaths in the family,' said Lettice. 'Oh, look, Margot! there they are in the carriage—it's a nicer one than Aunt Gwendolen's. Why don't you look, Margot? you're turning your head the other way!'

'You're forgetting your own rule about it being rude to stare, darling,' said Margot, with a faint smile.

'These swells are used to it,' said Allen; 'they come out to be stared at—don't you know that?'

'You forget,' she said, with a fine irony. 'How should I know what such people are like?'

'Well, I don't know much about 'em myself,' he confessed.

'Then, if I were you, I don't think I should talk about them.'

'You do come down on a chap,' he said, laughing. 'I can't open my mouth.'

'*That's* a story!' said Lettice, looking up at him critically, 'you are opening it now—quite wide.'

'Little girls should be seen and not heard,' he said.

'Great boys,' retorted Lettice, 'shouldn't be heard *or* seen—when they're like you. Margot and I want to talk, don't we, dear? We don't want *you*.'

'Oh, come,' he said, 'you're not going to make me walk by myself? I didn't begin it!'

Lettice had a great idea of fairness. ‘I think I *did* begin it perhaps,’ she admitted. ‘I suppose you can’t help laughing like that. I don’t mind your staying, if Margot doesn’t.’

‘I may walk with you, Margot; you’ve no objection, have you?’

Margot was in an absent mood again. ‘Oh, no,’ she said, recalling her thoughts with an effort, ‘of course you can walk with us if you want to—why not?’

Her thoughts were a little bitter just then; she had recognised Joceline Hotham in church, and had believed that, in spite of the calm stare her old schoolfellow had given her, the recognition was mutual. Under other circumstances she would not have cared; as it was, she was convinced that it was on account of her mother’s change of name that Joceline did not come forward to speak to her, though she forgot that she had been careful to avoid giving her the opportunity. She felt degraded in her own estimation, and shrank with an exaggerated unwillingness from facing one who had known her in the days when she had been serenely conscious of being the daughter of a gallant and distinguished officer, with no relations in the world of whom she had reason to be anything but proud. That was her father, now—the coarsely-made, unpolished man walking up the street ahead. This mean-looking youth at her side was her brother! How could she present them to Joceline? ‘It’s not snobbish,’ she thought, ‘to be ashamed, for how can I be anything else?’

CHAPTER II

ATTEMPTS TO MANUFACTURE A SILK PURSE

> If doughty deeds my lady please,
> Right soon I'll mount my steed;
> And strong his arm, and fast his seat,
> That bears frae me the meed.
>
> *Graham of Gartmore.*

Mrs. Chadwick's most dismal anticipations were not realised. Before she had been long at Gorsecombe, not only had the principal residents either called or left cards, but she had been recognised by more than one of the county families in the neighbourhood.

Mrs. Orme and Millicent were the first to set the example, as in duty bound. Mrs. Orme, who, as some clergymen's wives will, considered the formal recognition of the Vicarage no ordinary mark of distinction in any case, and in this, a favour denoting some liberality of views, was promptly made aware that the lady of Agra House had no intention of being patronised.

She was impressed by the signs of taste and well-directed wealth in the room she was shown into; she had expected the interior to be crude and barbaric, in harmony with the pompous ugliness without. Mrs. Chadwick's manner, too, made her feel herself almost provincial; involuntarily she found herself taking far more pains to establish an intimacy than she had ever intended to do on a first acquaintance.

Millicent, left to make overtures of friendship to Miss Chevening, thought her even more beautiful than she had on that first Sunday. How perfectly she was dressed, in that dark, close-fitting blue gown, with the loose folds of cool creamy stuff at her waist, and how lovely her hands were as they lay in her lap or hovered over the cups! 'Like the hands of that portrait of Romney's at Hawleigh Court,' thought Millicent, admiring her quite unreservedly and disinterestedly, as some girls—though by no means all—are capable of admiring beauty in their own sex.

'I hope,' she began, a little timidly, 'you begin to like Gorsecombe a little; we think it so pleasant.'

('Mr. Orme's sister,' Margot was thinking; 'not at all like him.') 'It is a pretty village,' she said, 'but of course we don't know any of the people yet.'

'Would you like to know some of them?' said Millicent, wondering whether she ought to be so eager; 'because—they will call, of course—but—but if you would come to the Vicarage next Saturday, you would meet some. Perhaps you don't care for tennis, though?'

'Oh, but I do,' said Margot; 'I should like to come, very much. I suppose you are great players?'

'I'm not much use at it, but my brother Nugent is thought rather good, I believe.'

'I think I have met your brother at Trouville,' said Margot; 'he was there last autumn, was he not?'

'Yes; how curious that you should have met him; I'm *so* glad!' cried Millicent, and feared she had been too gushing; she was wondering what Miss Chevening had thought of her brother, and whether he had been able to help falling in love with her. '*I* should, if I were he,' she told herself.

The hazel eyes betrayed nothing more than a friendly interest as Miss Chevening asked, 'Is he staying with you now?'

'Oh no, poor boy, he is up in town working hard—he so seldom gets away from his chambers; he may take a few days at Whitsuntide. I am very proud of my brother,' added Milicent.

At this moment the door opened roughly and a head was thrust in. 'I say, Margot?' said Allen's voice, 'have you seen——?' and then he turned red. 'Oh, I wasn't aware you had company—excuse me——' And the door shut again.

'I can quite understand your feelings, Miss Orme,' said Margot, as Allen vanished; 'that was my step-brother; he always has that quiet distinguished manner.'

She looked so innocently calm as she made this remark, that Millicent was almost afraid to accept it as ironical. 'I know him a little,' she said; 'he used to come to the Vicarage now and then. He found everything a little strange at first, and I'm afraid we made him feel rather shy. I am sorry—he is very good-natured.'

'*You* are very good-natured,' said Margot, a little ashamed of herself. 'I wish *I* could be. I ought not to have spoken like that, but I can't help it always.

You see,' she added, 'I am showing the worst of myself.'

'If *that* is your worst,' protested Millicent, 'I—I —am not much afraid. And, oh, I should like to have you for a friend so much—if you will let me?'

There was an enthusiastic admiration in her eyes which quite won Miss Chevening's already yielding heart. 'I shall be very glad,' she said simply. 'I have no friends here.' And Millicent went back to the Vicarage enraptured with her new friend and devoted to her service heart and soul.

Mrs. Eddlestone called, too, having stolen a march upon Miss Momber; she appeared one afternoon with her three daughters. 'We're such near neighbours,' she began in her high voice; 'I've been saying to my girls every day, "Now we really *must* go over and call on the Chadwicks!" but there are so many things to do in the country, and this is absolutely the first opportunity we've had. And how do you like Gorsecombe? We're very cheery people here, I can assure you. These are my girls—Dottie, Pussie, and Fay—young people, you see, like your own, and ready for anything in the way of amusement. I'm very often told that Gorsecombe would go *quite* to sleep if Holly Bank were to let, and there really is a little truth in it—we do contrive to keep our spirits up. I sometimes really have to beg for a little peace and quietness myself!'

The Eddlestone girls were rather unfortunate instances of the inconveniences of retaining a superannuated pet name, Pussie being thin with large extremities, Dottie tall and gaunt, and Fay alone plump. They all three took possession of Margot, and overwhelmed her with questions and descriptions, without requiring her to take any active part in the conversation, in which they gave evidence of strong animal spirits and the heartiest mutual admiration. 'Do you recite, dear Miss Chevening? I hope you do. No? really! then you must come and hear Fay; some people say they like her better than Clifford Harrison, and she never even *heard* him!'

'You mustn't believe all Pussie says, dear Miss Chevening,' said Fay. 'I know I recite abominably—now, Pussie is a poet. Mr. Callembore took a piece of hers for Tennyson once. Pussie's the genius of the family, though Dottie is a born artist: she sketches so quickly—such facility, you know, and she never had any lessons!'

'I'm sure you paint,' said Dottie. 'I shall be ashamed to let you see my daubs; but you must come out sketching with me as soon as it gets warmer.'

'Now,' said Fay, 'do tell me whom you know as yet, and we'll tell you what everybody's like. Have the Callembores called? They're *going* to, I know. He's considered so amusing, no one ever gives a dinner-party without asking them: as for her, she sits and smiles, but she doesn't sparkle. Not like Mrs. Megginson; she's great fun, with a husband just like a dissipated white mouse. Then there's the Admiral—do you know the dear Admiral? You must know the Admiral—such a delightful, noisy old love! And Mr. Powles, haven't you noticed Mr. Powles? with a face like a Death's head—

when he wears a white tie, it looks exactly like the cross-bones!' and so on, and so on, until the roll of residents was exhausted.

'At all events,' said Margot, with a weary little shrug, when they had gone, 'we shall not be dull. Do they *ever* leave off talking, I wonder?'

'They are a little overpowering, certainly,' said her mother; 'but they will be useful people to know.'

And through Holly Bank and the Vicarage, and visits arising from meetings at these places, the Chadwicks gradually became admitted into Gorsecombe society, though Chadwick was rather tolerated on his wife's account than welcomed on his own.

He did not seem to be aware of this, however. These Gorsecombe people were beginning to find out, he thought, that he was worth cultivating; he could get along without them now, but if they liked to be civil to him, why, he was willing to meet them half way. So he came into the drawing-room at times when callers were there, and did his best to be agreeable, though his efforts made his wife shiver occasionally; he drove with her to return visits, and was visibly elated by invitations to dinner.

There was one point on which he occasionally showed himself a little intractable: he was disposed to resent the way in which his son was eclipsed by his step-daughters. 'Why do they leave Allen out of their invites?' he would say to his wife; 'there's little notes always coming in from the Vicarage or Holly Bank and uch places, asking will Margot, or Margot and Ida, or all three and the governess, come in for lawn tennis, or afternoon tea, or what not—but I never hear of their asking Allen. What's he done to be left out?'

'Why, my dear Joshua, the truth is Allen is just a little inclined to keep himself in the background—he doesn't seem quite at home with the people here, and they conclude, of course, that he would prefer not to be asked.'

'He must come out of the background, then,' said his father; 'he's a good lad enough, he only wants a little encouragement to hold his own with the best of them.'

'I'm afraid,' sighed Mrs. Chadwick, 'he doesn't do himself quite justice—that unfortunate manner of his!'

'What's wrong with his manner? I don't see much amiss with it myself. Shy? All young fellows who are not puppies *are* shy. You can't expect a young fellow brought up as he's been to take to this sort of life all at once. If your girls chose, they could soon put him in the way of behaving like other people—they don't find any difficulty in it themselves, apparently.'

'They have always been considered to have rather good manners,' said Mrs. Chadwick. 'It is not quite a new experience for them, you see.'

'Well,' concluded Chadwick, 'I must give him a talking to, that's all; I can't have my son left out in the cold. He must do like other young fellows in his position.'

But if Allen was left unnoticed by Gorsecombe, he was contented enough; he was under the same roof with Margot, he saw her every day, and could even address her by her christian name without fearing a rebuke. She was not ungracious to him, too, in her careless fashion; habit was doing its usual work, and she submitted to the necessity of listening and replying to his remarks without open impatience, even though her inward repulsion was as deep as ever, and she was not really more reconciled to being so nearly related to one at whom she even avoided looking unless absolutely compelled.

And though Ida took far less trouble to hide her feelings, and Allen's sentiments for her were not cordial, he had succeeded at last in recommending himself to Lettice's favour. Yarrow had acted as the mediator between them. 'It's funny that Margot's dog should be so fond of you,' she told him candidly, and then added, with a gleam of tact, 'at least, I mean because he doesn't generally make friends with anybody all at once, you know; but if he likes you, I suppose *I* must.'

It was rather a patronising form of liking, it must be confessed, such as Lettice might have bestowed upon a gardener's boy, or a stable-help, but Allen was not particular.

He felt his own inferiority deeply, in spite of spasmodic and rather pathetic attempts to assert himself. Next to Margot—who seemed to him a being infinitely far removed and to be worshipped in secret under pain of arousing her displeasure—this little sister of hers held the dearest place in his heart, with her quaint alternations of dignity and fun, and her pretty chatter like the trilling of some voluble small bird. He did her bidding humbly, although he ventured to adopt a more familiar and brotherly manner towards her, and Lettice occasionally criticised his shortcomings with a freedom which he took in perfect good part. 'I suppose,' she said to him meditatively one day, when he was assisting her in some gardening operations, 'you never had any governess when you were little?'

'Me?' said Allen, with his spluttering laugh, 'not much; why?'

'Only because—you won't mind my telling you, will you?—she would have taught you how to eat differently. You do make—well, *rather* a noise, you know, and then you eat so very fast. I had to be told how myself!' she added considerately.

'I never thought how I eat before. I say, Lettie, does—does Margot ever say anything about it?'

'Margot?—oh look, isn't that one of those horrid little green atheists on that stalk? No, it's too early for them yet, isn't it?—No, Margot doesn't; mother does sometimes, so I thought I'd speak to you myself. I was sure it was only because you didn't *know*—there, that's enough water for those things! I'll race you to the monkey-tree!'

Unfortunately the result of these well-meant monitions was only to make him more self-conscious at meals than ever; his step-mother's expression was very eloquent at times, but she made no remark until one day, when some *gaucherie* of his at luncheon had provoked even his father, whose watchfulness had been aroused by private complaints, to make a comment. 'I did not like to speak before,' she said, 'but really, with every disposition to make allowances, I think we might expect *some* regard to be shown to the ordinary rules of behaviour. It isn't much to ask from you, Allen!'

'I—I did it without thinking,' he said. 'I'm sure I ask your pardon.'

Mrs. Chevening gave a resigned little sigh; Margot kept her eyes on the table, and Lettice alone looked at the culprit with serious eyes, and her cheeks sympathetically flushed.

'If you can't understand that you're sitting at a gentleman's table,' said his father, 'the best thing you can do is to leave it.'

His father had never before seen anything amiss with his manners, thought Allen, as he rose with a vague impression that it was required of him. 'Don't send him away this time,' pleaded Lettice, 'he does mean to behave nicely!'

'*I* don't want him to go so long as he minds his manners,' said Chadwick gruffly; 'sit down, Allen, and don't make a fool of yourself—d'ye hear?'

He sat down with a fiery face and a swelling of his heart. He felt disgraced in Margot's eyes as she sat there with her air of being aloof from it all; even Lettice's intercession had hurt him, somehow, though he was grateful for her good intentions.

This incident, trivial as it was, had the effect of opening Chadwick's eyes more clearly to his son's defects. His wife was careful to keep them before him without appearing to show more than a motherly solicitude, and they began to worry him at last. Still the fatherly instinct within him, which had slumbered so many years and had been quickened by his son's admiring and dutiful attitude on their first acquaintance, made him fertile in excuses and plans.

'People down here won't trouble about his being a bit rough,' he would say; 'and he'll soon get over that, with a little looking after. He'll do very well if he takes to sport, and he's young enough still to make himself good at that sort of thing. I must see that he keeps up his riding.'

And one day at breakfast he said suddenly: 'I suppose you feel pretty comfortable in the saddle now, eh, Allen?'

'I haven't ridden since we've all been here together,' said Allen.

'I know that; I meant to ride with you myself, but I've had other things to think about—but when you *did* ride, you were all right, eh?'

'Pretty well,' said Allen, conscious of some exaggeration, even in this.

'Ah, you can't ride the new carriage horses, you know, and I want my own cob myself, so I shall have to see about getting a horse for you—well, can't you *say* something?'

'Thanks, father.'

'And you must learn to stick on it. I want you to follow the hounds next season. I'm too old to take to it myself, so there's more reason you should do it for me—that's the way *you'll* have to make your friends.'

Allen heard with a certain pleasurable excitement; he had ridden very seldom, and the sober old carriage-horse that carried him had spared him any unpleasant experiences. He thought it would be a fine thing to have a horse of his own and hunt when the winter came, as if he had been a country gentleman all his life—perhaps Margot would look on him then with greater respect!

Chadwick lost no time in fulfilling his promise by going up to Tattersall's and selecting a horse—a handsome, powerful beast with excellent manners, which could be trusted to carry Allen. After trying it himself, he rode out daily with Allen, who did his best to perfect his horsemanship. Unfortunately he might conceivably have had a better riding-master, for, though Chadwick had of necessity ridden constantly in India, and had a firm enough seat, he found it difficult to communicate his method, except by advising his son to stick on and not let his horse get the better of him—rules which, after all, rather beg the question at issue.

However, the new horse went well enough, and he was not observant enough to see that Allen had no real notion of controlling him, and was only fortified by his father's presence. 'Plenty of action!' Chadwick would say complacently; 'you're getting on terms with him already, and there are not many young fellows about here better mounted, I can tell you—cost me a pretty penny, Hussar did. Steady, horse. Lost your stirrups, eh? that's nothing—you must learn to do without 'em, you'll shake down right enough.'

In a somewhat different sense, Allen thought this only too probable; but in his anxiety to satisfy his father, he did not dare to betray by words how extremely precarious he felt his tenure of the saddle to be, and, thanks to the forbearance of Hussar, who was quite aware that he was under close supervision, he avoided any actual mischance.

And Chadwick, naturally anxious to feel proud of his son, did not need much encouragement to make him so; he began to make little half-jocular half-boasting allusions to Allen's riding to persons he happened to be talking with. 'Oh,' he would say, 'there aren't many places round here we don't know by this time, my son and I. We ride a good deal—every day, wet or fine. It's not so much on my own account as his, the young rascal—getting quite the jockey, ha-ha!' Or he would say to some member of the hunt after dinner: 'No, I shan't come out myself next autumn, never went in for pigsticking or polo or a run after jackal out in Bengal, had too much to do—all that has come in since my time. But there's my son, he'll represent me, and, between ourselves, I don't fancy I shall be ashamed of him across country by the time he's had a little more practice.' And his hearer, if he had chanced to observe Allen on horseback, would do his best to control his countenance and reply with a civil hope that they would see young Mr. Chadwick in the hunting-field before very long.

It flattered the father's vanity to dwell upon this event, which he chose to consider as in the near future.

'I've been telling Topham'—(Topham was the coachman)—he said one day, 'that it's time he put up a hurdle or two in the paddock and saw you take Hussar over them—do you more good than anything, you know, a few falls will. But Topham thinks we'd better wait till the ground's a bit softer again. This hard, dry spell can't last long, unless I've forgotten what an English May is like.'

Allen was relieved at any postponement, and as his father was much occupied soon after with business affairs and Topham by no means cared to be responsible for his young master's safety across hurdles, the matter was allowed to drop. One morning, when the stable-boy brought round the horses as usual, and Allen stood on the steps waiting for his father, Chadwick called to him from the window of his study.

'I can't go out this morning, my boy, too much to attend to, so you must manage on Hussar alone for to-day.'

'Mayn't I have Topham, or the boy, to go with me?'

'No, you mayn't; your mother wants the carriage after lunch, and the boy's got his own work. You must learn to get on by yourself; gives you confidence. There, tumble up, and be off—you'll be all right.'

Allen did not dare to protest: he mounted, and Hussar went off down the drive with one or two puzzled glances behind for the cob, which he seemed to miss.

Of course the horse was not long in realising the situation, and in taking advantage of it. He swung leisurely along, with an offensive assumption of not being obliged to hurry; he stopped and looked over gates with new-born interest in scenery, and showed an eccentric preference for the side-path; he pricked his ears in mock nervousness at every striking object in the road, and broke into capricious trots or sidelong ambles; it was creditable to him that he did not do much more than this, but, as it was, he gave Allen quite enough trouble. It was a warm day, and he felt helpless and hot and miserable, at the mercy of this headstrong beast. But for his fear of his father, he would gladly have turned his head homeward; but on he jogged jerkily over the road, which steamed and glittered under a May sun. He could almost have wished himself back in the dingy city office again, as he was that time last year; but no, that was the same as wishing that Margot and Lettice, and this new, luxurious, strangely troubling existence could be blotted out. He did not mean that, of course. He must keep up his pluck; Margot liked a chap to have a good pluck, he wasn't going to own himself a coward before her; and he hit Hussar across the shoulders and jerked the curb, which caused the animal to toss his head and snort indignantly. At that moment a farmer's cart turned sharp round the corner with something jingling under the seat, and Hussar, his nerves really fretted at last, broke into a canter which became a gallop, though not at any time an absolute bolt. Fortunately he was not difficult to sit at any pace, or poor Allen would soon have been in the road; but he had lost all control over him, and was just giving himself up for lost, when the horse, having had enough of it, slackened of his own accord, until he returned to his former fidgety walk.

Considerably exhausted and demoralised by all this, Allen sat limply in his saddle with a dismal conviction that with one more such escapade on Hussar's part they would part company, and it would take little enough to startle him now. He could not make up his mind to dismount, especially as Hussar would not stand, and so he went on under the branching elms, through whose budding branches the sun struck in iridescent rays which seemed to irritate Hussar still further.

Suddenly, at another turn of the road, he saw a figure he knew approaching.

'Bob,' he called, 'Bob Barchard!'

It was a young fellow about his own age, with sandy hair and a freckled white face, with something at once impudent and cunning in the small sunken eyes. As he heard himself called, he quickened his step and came up. 'So, then, you are on yer cockhorse!' he said, with a cool smile; 'it's fine to be you!'

'Is it?' said Allen, with an oath. 'I've had a nice business of it with this beast, I can tell you, Bob; he's run away with me once.'

'I thought it was queer-like, you stopping to speak to such as me,' said Bob, 'you've got among such fine folk now—but that accounts for it. Fact is,' he said, looking at the horse, 'you ain't up to managing a horse like that; he's a beauty, he is, but you never ought to come out alone on him. Why, I'd make that horse go as quiet!'

'I wish you were on him instead of me, then,' said Allen. '*Can* you ride, Bob?'

'Me ride?' said Bob, 'why, I've rode since I was that high. They let me exercise the animals up at Lane's farm when they're short of men—there ain't anything I'd mind getting on!'

'Would you like to try Hussar for a bit?' suggested Allen, with a sudden desperate hope. Barchard laughed in his face. 'We're uncommon good-natured this morning,' he said, 'you're sure you can spare him? No, thank 'ee, I won't deprive you!'

'Bob,' said Allen, 'this brute 'll have me off, I know he will! Do me a good turn, and lead him back till we get near the village.'

'Can't be bothered leading a horse,' said Bob; 'it was ride him just now, I thought.'

'Ride him back, then—I can walk.'

Bob grinned. 'You've been flustering him a bit,' he said, 'he'll take some riding, the way he is—likely he'll try it on with me. Howsoever, I'll oblige you, if I risk my own neck doing it. We were pals once!'

Bob's indifference had been only feigned; he would have given one of his fingers to be in the saddle on that mettlesome hunter, and only his inbred shrewdness had kept him from closing with the offer at once. He was the son of a local decorator and plumber, a well-to-do man who allowed him to do much as he liked, and Bob's reputation in Gorsecombe and the surrounding villages was none of the best. He was about Allen's age, but the rustic youth was more than a match for the other in knowledge of the world, and during the months in which Allen had been left alone at Agra House, had managed to make his acquaintance, and obtain a certain ascendency over him.

And the next moment he was on Hussar, and Allen, in whom an immense relief was struggling with a certain shame, was walking along the road at his side. ‘Now, you see how he goes with me,’ said young Barchard; ‘I'll come back.’ And, striking his heel against Hussar's side, he cantered off. How easy it looked, thought poor dismounted Allen; why couldn't *he* make the horse obey him like that? For Bob had not exaggerated; he had a fair seat, and firm if not very light hands, which Hussar appreciated the more by contrast.

Presently he came back at a gallop, and reined up with a lurking grin on his face. ‘Here's a go,’ he said: ‘I saw your father's carriage coming along—oh, they ain't near yet. I thought I'd better give you the friendly tip!’

Allen turned pale. ‘Did they see you?’ he said. ‘Here, Bob, I must get on again—there's no help for it.’ But Bob did not mean to yield possession just yet. ‘No time for that!’ he said. ‘We're about the same size and colour, I reckon—chuck me that cap of yours and take mine—quick! they'll be round the bend—that's it; now you slip down by the bridge, and lay low till they're by, and I'll trot on smart and turn my head t'other way—*they* won't notice!’

The road made a sharp bend to the left just there, crossing a bridge over the railway; to the right was a lane as wide as the road, which sloped down to the level of the line. Bob was off on Hussar as he spoke, and

Allen had no choice but to follow his advice; he got behind the brick parapet and waited with a beating heart. He was ashamed of his weakness; and yet, as he told himself sullenly, it was all very well—was it his fault that he could not manage the horse? Was he bound to let his neck be broken, as it might have been, but for Bob? Only what would be thought of him, if it was known? Perhaps, even now, his step-mother was stopping the carriage, misled by appearances! What a time the wheels were in coming!—at last, that was the carriage! and from the upper level he heard the trot of horses and the soft splutter of wheels on the muddy road pass and die away in the distance towards Closeborough—the danger was past!

He came out and soon rejoined Barchard. 'All right,' he heard him shout, 'I went by in a flash like, and shoved the cap well down over my eyes—they never spotted 'twarn't you, I'll go bail!'

And so they went on till they were near the gates. 'I've taken the freshness out of him for you,' said the disinterested Bob, 'you'll be equal to sitting him up the drive. You'd never ha' got him home without you'd met me. If you're going out this way again, you'd better let me know.'

'I shan't go out this way again, if I know it!' said Allen, and he meant it.

'Why,' said his father, as he met him on his return, 'you are late, old boy! I began to think something was the matter; but then, I might have known you could be trusted to look after yourself. Why, you've had a good hard ride, I can see. Famous! Did you meet the carriage? Your mother had lunch early and drove over to Closeborough.'

'I know,' said Allen, 'they passed us.'

'And you've had a good tittup, eh?'

'Yes,' said the miserable Allen, 'I've had a good tittup.'

If he could but have owned the real truth—but he was afraid; next time his father would go out with him, Hussar would behave better, he could never again place himself in such a predicament; why should he expose himself unnecessarily? It was so easy to say nothing, and make good resolutions for the future.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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